University of Alberta

DIALOGUE JOURNAL WRITING AND ADULT ESL STUDENTS: A TOOL FOR LEARNING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

By

Joanie Alana Parker ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

of Master of Education in Adult and Higher Education

Department of Educational Policy Studies

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Dialogue Journal Writing and Adult ESL Students: A Tool for Learning Language and Culture** submitted by Joanie Alana Parker in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Adult and Higher Education.

Dave Collett, Supervisor

Joyce Bainbridge

Don Richards

Date: Sept 16/99

DEDICATION

With love, I dedicate this thesis to my mother June, and my father Tom, who have both never stopped believing in me and have supported me throughout my years of learning. Also to my husband Dave and my sister Janet who have so patiently indulged me and so encouraged me throughout my years of study.

Abstract

This study explored the use of dialogue journals as a tool for adult ESL students to learn English and to understand Canadian culture.

I carried out this qualitative research study as a teacher researcher in the context of my own classroom. Sources of data included the students' journals, samples of other assigned writing and transcriptions of taped interviews with the students and with other teachers. Through analysis of the journal entries I determined the topics, patterns and themes in the content of the journal entries. The journal entries were also examined to determine the process of the students' written language development over the period of the study.

The study demonstrated that writing is a valid means for adult ESL students to learn English as a second language and to gain a further understanding of Canadian culture. Also, many of the theories established in learning a first language apply to learning a second language.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

> In Canada, I don't think we've really explored
> how the immigration experience changes people,
> when they move from one country to another.
> It's easier just to comment on different foods and
> folkloric dances than to really understand what
> people go through when they emigrate.
>
> Nino Ricci quoted in Bissoondath (1994, p. 78).

This study stems from a lifelong interest in cultures other than my own. As a child I was intrigued with reading stories and hearing about people from other cultures. I later had the opportunity of living in England for a year where I was exposed to a wide diversity of ethnic groups. I was also fortunate enough to experience teaching English as a second language (ESL) to adults in Japan for two years. When I returned to Canada I worked at the International Student Centre at the University of Alberta in program planning with foreign students. After several years I returned to teaching ESL and taught for two urban school boards as well as at the University of Alberta's Faculty of Extension in the English language program.

For over six years now I have been teaching adult immigrants and refugees in a program offered by Continuing Education within a large urban school district. I have always approached my teaching with inquiry and reflection on my observations of the students' learning experiences surrounding language learning. Shortly after I started teaching with students in Continuing Education I began using journals as a way for students to express their ideas in written form while learning to write by writing. Many of the benefits of journal writing which I experienced with the students I was teaching were similar to those of Isaacs and Brodine (1994):

> Writing in journals encourages students to find their own voices, promotes writing fluency, and instills confidence. Too often, many would-be writers see writing as difficult and laborious – having to follow a set of

> rules for grammar, spelling and punctuation. That response censors the writer and dampens the creative process; ideas are never put to paper. In journaling, students focus on the uninhibited expression of their thoughts and ideas (ix).

My desire to know more about how journaling can serve as a way for ESL students to learn the English language and Canadian culture led me into this study. This research will contribute to the existing body of knowledge in ESL, and it will add to the present body of knowledge in journal writing for students whose first language is English. According to Staton, Shuy, Peyton and Reed (1988):

> Much of the importance of dialogue journals has come from their adaptability to many different kinds of inter-personal settings in which communication, reading/writing development or both are central needs (p.xi).

They also point out that one major application of dialogue journals has been among teachers of English as a second language. Peyton and Staton (1996), define dialogue journals "as written conversations between the student and teacher, kept in a bound notebook or on a computer disk" (p. 17). They go on to point out that, dialogue journal writing is interactive. Teacher and student take turns writing and responding over a period of time, about whatever interests them. The goal is to communicate in writing, to exchange ideas and information free of the concern for form and correctness so often imposed on developing writers (p.17). They also say that: "Although dialogue journals are just now becoming more widely used in adult literacy settings, they have been adopted since 1980 in many other educational settings" (p.2).

While journal writing is well established as a process for reflection and learning, very little research has been done on the use of journals as a tool for promoting literacy with adults, especially with English as a second language (ESL) adult students. Therefore, I present this study as an innovative approach to support the teaching of English as a second language and the socialization into a new culture for adult students who are newcomers to Canadian society.

I have chosen to use the dialogue journal as a data source since this is a personal form of writing where students can take risks to express their thoughts, feelings and experiences and to focus on fluency before the demands of correct form. K. E. Danielson (1988) describes her view of the role of dialogue journals:

> Writing...,is active, interactive, personal, and public.... One form of personal writing teachers are beginning to use is the dialogue journal. Dialogue journals are a functional form of writing, much like having a conversation with another person: the student writes an entry and then the teacher writes a response to the content of the student's entry . . . . Dialogue journals allow both the reader and writer to take risks in print as they discuss issues relevant to both of them (p.7).

Background to the Study

The purpose of this study, as stated in more detail later in this chapter, was to explore dialogue journals with my ESL students as a tool for learning language and culture. The context for this study was my own classroom, part of a program known as Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC). The LINC program is a service provided by the federal government for immigrants and refugees admitted to Canada annually. Canada is a multicultural and multilingual country. The richness of Canada's racial and cultural diversity can be seen in the combination of peoples and cultures, heritages and languages, religions and history that make up this nation. The number of immigrants and refugees coming into Canada in the past two decades has increased the diversity of languages, other than French or English, found in Canada. According to the 1996 census put out by Statistics Canada Daily Release, Dec. 2, 1997:

> The data collected showed that the multilingual nature of Canada is growing as a result of increased immigration. In 1996, there were 4.7 million people who reported a mother tongue other than English or French. The presence of languages other than English or French reflects the ethnic and linguistic diversity that characterizes the nation. Almost 80% of the 1,039,000 immigrants who came to Canada between 1991 and 1996 reported a non-official language as mother tongue. More than half of them were from Asia and the Middle East.

Zhang (1995) in her critical overview of teaching ESL in Canada shows how the sources of immigrants "have shifted from Europe to southern and eastern Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and eastern Europe" (p.105). For the ten year period 1981 to 1991, for instance, more than two-thirds of Canada's immigrants came from developing countries and Zhang believes this trend will continue into the 21st century. The majority of the 225,000 immigrants entering Canada annually have racial, linguistic, religious and cultural backgrounds different from the predominantly European immigrants in the first half of the 20th century.

The countries from which Canada's immigrants and refugees come are determined by Canada's immigration policy and this policy is currently under review. An Immigration Legislative Review Committee was established in 1994 to make recommendations to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration for new directions for immigration beyond the year 2000. The committee submitted to the Minister its report, Not Just Numbers: A Canadian Framework for Future Immigration, (1997). This report expresses the need for a new legislative and accountability framework for Canadian immigration. It points out the cumbersome nature of the present Immigration Act which "has been amended more than 30 times since it came into force in 1978" (p.12).

The recommendations made by the Legislative Review Committee are based on major international and national factors such as globalization, market economy and technology which influence change. The core values and principles held by Canadians were also a guiding principle of the committee. "Canadians generally hold deeply rooted values that reflect our basic morality and sense of fairness, and that define us as a nation.... Language is also a defining value of Canada; some rudimentary knowledge of at least one of the official languages is seen as necessary for integration into Canadian society" (p.6).

This report includes 172 recommendations for the Immigration and Citizenship Act. In the report two separate pieces of legislation have been proposed – one on Immigration and Citizenship and one on Protection:

> The current Act includes three main parts: the selection of immigrants, the protection of our borders, and the removal of persons who do not meet the requirements for being in Canada. [However], there is virtually no mention of integration . . . [and] there needs to be a direct link between the selection of immigrants and their ability to integrate (p.3).

Although a knowledge of English or French has always been part of Canada's policy for new immigrants it is now recognized by the Canadian government as a key determinant for successful integration. Zhang (1995) points out that many writers have emphasized the importance of speaking English or French as an essential attribute influencing employment in Canadian society (p.107). Equally as important, especially for Canadian citizenship, is an understanding of Canadian culture. This point is emphasized in the following excerpt from the report, Not Just Numbers: A Canadian Framework for Future Immigration (1997), in which there is an emphasis on:

> . . . the ability of immigrants to function in French or English before coming to Canada; if they cannot do so, we expect them to make a financial contribution to their own language upgrading . . . For individuals to be fully integrated and to become contributing members of Canadian society, they need to find employment and utilize their skills and training (pp.35, 36).

Although the teaching of English as a second language over the years has aimed at providing competency in one of the two official languages – English or French, little has been done to help immigrants to adjust to the culture of their new country. However, this is changing today, especially with the Canadian government's program, Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), in which I teach. The objective of LINC, according to a Fact Sheet put out by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (1994), is twofold: First, is "to provide basic language instruction in one of Canada's official languages" and second, "to facilitate the social, cultural and economic integration of immigrants and refugees into Canada."

Another important change which has coincided with the LINC program is the development of Canadian Language Benchmarks Assessment (CLBA). This is a 145 page document put out by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (1996). CLBA is a set of

task-based descriptors of English language ability. Before language training can be given, immigrants and refugees must be rated to determine their level of language proficiency. The CLBA provides an indication of the amount of training which may be required for people to achieve the LINC program outcome competency level. LINC strives to achieve a uniform quality of language training across the country:

> The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks was established to promote the coherence, effectiveness, and consistency of English as a second language (ESL) instruction, so that learners can become full participants in all aspects of Canadian society. (CLBA, Program Overview)

In ESL teaching one of the main goals is to help students to master the English language, but equally important is helping students to develop an understanding of Canadian culture. Since all activities involve language, and culture cannot be separated from language, it is important to build a cultural component into language learning and literacy development.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to explore dialogue journal writing with adult ESL students as a tool for learning language and culture. The research question asked was: In the views of adult ESL students and their teachers, how does dialogue journal writing help in the development of competency and confidence in students' acquisition of English and contribute to a better understanding of Canadian culture?

Sub-questions

This research was guided more specifically by the following sub-questions:

1. How do the topics the students write about in their journals relate to the

characteristics of a culture?

2. What are the patterns and themes that emerge in the journal entries?
3. How does writing in journals enable students' development in language acquisition?
4. What is the student's disposition toward writing as a way of learning about a new language and culture?

Context of Study

The study was carried out in my own classroom in a school which offers a program for adults in English as a Second Language. The program is funded and organized by the federal government and provides Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC). This program is designed mainly for adults who have immigrated to Canada. As the teacher in this program, I carried out the research as part of my teaching. The students wrote in dialogue journals individually every day and opportunities were provided to share their writing with each other and with me as audience. The students asked each other questions about what they had written and responded to the content of their peers' journal entries. They also shared their writing with me and as their teacher I responded to their journals. In addition to writing individually, the students sometimes wrote in small groups or as a whole class. They wrote first thing in the morning for a period of about 45 minutes. The writing was either preceded by or followed by conversation or brain-storming, or both.

The LINC program operates year round and is divided into sessions of 10 weeks. The classes vary in size but usually consist of 10 - 20 students. The participants' ages, educational backgrounds and countries of origin also vary but what they have in common is that they are all immigrants and refugees who want to learn the language and culture of Canada.

Significance

This research has the potential to add a new dimension to the field of ESL education particularly in the area of curriculum design and methodology. It will also add to the body of knowledge in journal writing in regular classrooms, particularly with the emphasis on integration of diverse ethnic backgrounds in these classrooms. According to Peyton and Staton (1993):

> Dialogue journals have become an accepted educational practice. In elementary and secondary schools they are used as one kind of early and continued writing experience in both native and second language settings. . . . Increasing diversity brings with it a corresponding need for educators to be sensitive and responsive to students who bring to school a wide variety of linguistic and cultural heritages and educational backgrounds (xii).

Another aspect of this research relates to its importance in preparing immigrants for employment. Communication skills may be strongly enhanced through journal writing. Literacy, as I have already indicated is a necessary tool for successful economic performance in industrialized societies. I discuss this more fully later in this chapter in a section called Literacy and the ESL Learner.

This study offers possibilities for other teachers to develop a journal writing program as part of the curriculum and to use journal writing as a teaching tool for more effective instruction. Peyton and Staton (1996) support this concept when they state: "The processes that occur in effective oral language learning can occur in reading and writing as well, if reading and writing are understood as fundamentally dialogic" (p. 3). They continue by saying that many adult literacy teachers use social interaction as a process in teaching oral English as a second language but "have difficulty finding effective means to make reading and writing acts of mutual social construction" (p. 3). They also point out the use of dialogue journals as a means of developing meaning for the students when they say: "Dialogue journals are one way of making overt, for teachers and for students, the nature of reading and writing as negotiated language interactions in which meaning is

developed" (p.3).

In addition this study will provide and expand our present knowledge of writing for learning. The writings of scholars such as James Britton (1970, 1982), Margaret Meek (1991), Donald Murray (1984), Jerome Bruner (1996) and Terry Piper (1998) about the nature of language and literacy learning, deal mainly with children. However, their theories can also serve as theoretical guidance to support language learning programs designed for adults.

Limitations

The number of participants in this study was relatively small. In order to gain a true picture of the value of journal writing in ESL programs a longitudinal study of these same students using this same approach over a longer period of time would be required.

Outcomes

The outcomes of this study were helpful for students who wrote in journals as they gained further competency and confidence in using the English language. This in turn better enabled and empowered the students to adjust to living in a new culture. The outcomes of this study can also be useful for teachers in helping them to develop an effective journal writing program to be used as a teaching tool and as part of the curriculum.

Assumptions About Language Learning

This study focused on the use and the value of dialogue journals as a means for ESL

students to grow in cultural understanding and in language development. As part of my exploration into the students' participation in writing for learning I realized it was important for me to think about my own beliefs about the nature of language and how language is learned. I was reminded of the words of Chris Argyris cited in Judith Newman's "Learning to Teach by Uncovering Our Assumptions" (1987), who said that "Everything we do in the classroom is founded on a set of assumptions about learning and teaching, about knowledge, and about what counts as legitimate reading and writing" (p.727). As I reflected on my own assumptions about teaching English, how adult students learn and what counts as legitimate activities, I realized that as a teacher over the past several years my beliefs and actions have been shaped and guided by the work of many language educators. The following assumptions, which are reflected in the work of Britton (1970), Halliday (1975), Smith (1982), Graves (1983) and Bruner (1996) are fundamental to my own approach to teaching and to this study:

- **Language is learned by using it in meaningful and purposeful ways.** Language learning grows when there is a reason to use it such as writing in a dialogue journal. Engaging in such a task gives the purpose meaning and relevancy for the learner. People do not study a language and then apply it later on. It can only be learned in the course of participating in it. (Britton, 1970; Halliday, 1975; Smith, 1983).

- **Language learning in all its forms is a social and interactive activity.** Language is by nature a process learned in a context of social interaction. It grows through written conversations such as those experienced in the use of response journals where the student writes and the teacher responds. It also develops in the context of verbal conversations in the form of talk. Smith (1983) claims, that writing "often requires other people to stimulate discussion, to provide spellings, to listen to choice phrases, and even just for companionship in an activity that can be so personal and unpredictable that it creates considerable stress" (p.86).

- **Writing reflectively acts as a means of clarifying experience.**
  As we recall, reflect on and record our thoughts and experiences using expressive language we are involved in a process of mulling over or clarifying for ourselves the meaning of what we are thinking and writing. Writing and thinking go hand in hand. Britton (1982) describes this connection as a process of discovery or of reading "into our own writing something which we weren't fully aware of before we started to write" (p.110). In other words, as we write we are shaping and reshaping our thoughts.

- **Language and culture cannot be separated.**
  The nature of the dominant language of any group of people is shaped and defined by the history, beliefs, traditions and geography of a particular culture. And the way we understand and use this language affects our overall view of the world we live in and our place in it. Bruner (1996) confirms this belief when he points out that "... culture shapes mind, that it provides us with the toolkit by which we construct not only our worlds but our very conceptions of our selves and our powers" (p.x). The reality of this notion has strong significance for ESL learners whose values and understandings naturally are rooted in their native culture and in their first language. Ashworth (1995) points out that "Culture is acquired; ESL students must acquire not only a new language but the culture in which it is embedded" (p.64).

- **The teaching of writing requires a teacher who understands the writing process.** Graves (1983) stresses the point that students learning to write need to have a teacher who has also "wrestled with writing" (p.6). Or as Smith (1983) says, 'A "teacher" who dislikes or fears writing will demonstrate that writing is to be disliked or feared ...' (p.87). I believe that to be effective as a teacher of beginning ESL students learning to write I need to have a clear understanding of the writing process myself and to share my interest and joy of writing with them.

Methodology

This study was based on naturalistic, qualitative and descriptive perspectives and I was guided by the notion of action research (teacher as researcher) as I was both teacher and researcher in my own classroom. This dual role is consistent with the purpose of the research which is a form of professional development for the teacher. Data consisted of samples of students' journal writing in my classroom as well as transcripts of taped interviews with my students and with other teachers. I have used purposeful sampling (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996) to select 9 students' journals out of a total of 31. Data also consisted of interviews with four other teachers in the same school who did journal writing with their students.

Literacy and the ESL Learner

Literacy, a universal concern, is interpreted in different ways by different groups of people. There are various definitions of adult literacy although most definitions in Canada and the United States are fairly similar. Chall, Heron, and Hilferty (1987) describe the following three levels or standards of literacy. The first standard is relatively low – one that defines literacy as being able to read only the simplest texts and street signs. This is often referred to as "below" the level of functional literacy (below fourth grade level on standardized reading tests). A higher standard includes the ability to read such simple texts as a local newspaper or articles in digest magazines (about an eighth grade reading level). The third standard includes the ability to read technical manuals in industry and the military and such magazines as Time and Newsweek (pp.190-191). "If we use completion of grade 9 as a benchmark (as suggested by UNESCO) to define functional literacy the numbers are about the same for both men and women" (p.26).

In Canada and the United States illiteracy is a great concern because millions of adults cannot read or write. This is considered a serious threat to these countries' economies in this technological age. According to Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, the term illiteracy is defined as "having little or no education; especially unable to read or write". This definition is consistent with the definition provided by LINC offered with Continuing Education for students who are tested before entering the LINC program. Most people who are literate take reading and writing for granted. The domination of print in our culture has made the acquisition of reading/writing skills an essential element of what it means to be literate. However, the broader definition of literacy is all encompassing and defined not only as a means of communicating but as a means of empowerment and critical consciousness which enables the individual to participate in a meaningful way in society (Britton, 1970; Freire, 1970; and Stenhouse, 1984). And even though the perception of literacy is interpreted differently across cultures and the standards of literacy vary there is a universal meaning.

The reason it can be applied universally is because of the commonality, not of the expression, but of the meaning of literacy. It is this broader view of literacy that I see as having universal application and this is substantiated by educators such as Robert Pattison (1982) who says:

> Different people and different societies will be conscious of themselves as users of language in different ways, and will display their awareness in different media with different skills, yet each may be called literate. ... literacy is a combination of variables – individual and cultural awareness of language and the interplay of this awareness with the means of expression ... (pp.vi-vii).

Today the terms "literate", "functionally literate" and "illiterate" are used by the media and politicians to point out how schools are failing to turn out graduates who are able to read or write. Hence, literacy in recent years has become one of the top priorities of the Canadian and American governments. The politicians want the schools to produce literate citizens to compete in the global market, and be capable of participating in a

technological society so that their countries will have an edge in the world of tomorrow.

In the following chapter I will discuss the theories and research in language development, dialogue journals and some of the various approaches to ESL teaching today. A search of the literature indicates there is a lack of research in the area of journal writing in ESL with adults. However, according to Piper (1993):

> ... we are not working entirely in the dark. We have the benefit of an abundance of quality data about ... learning language and we have the privilege and the ability to consider those data and the theories which they either support or refute within our own observations and experiences as teachers ... (p.164).

Chapter 2

A Search of the Literature

English as a Second Language (ESL) has been taught to new immigrants for many decades, yet, despite what we have learned through research in the area of language and literacy learning, very little has changed in the way ESL is taught. Approaches to how ESL is currently taught will be discussed in more detail later on in this chapter. I will examine the recent research, theories and practices in language development, the use of journal writing to improve communication and meaning-making, and the way ESL is generally being taught today. I will also examine the ongoing body of work in the field of action research or the teacher-as-researcher (this will be included in the chapter on methodology).

Many of the changes in curriculum and methodologies for teaching language learning to students in schools' K-12 have come about as a direct result of research studies in language development and the relationship between the nature of language and literacy learning. A significant body of research in second language learning does show that writing in a second language is more difficult than writing in a first language, yet this same research also shows that the thought processes for first-language and second-language writing are similar (Mlynarczyk, 1998. p. xii).

Literature Related to Literacy

A search of the literature shows that there are few research studies concerning the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL) as a meaning-making experience for adult immigrants learning English. On the other hand, there is a wealth of research studies, theories, and practical application supporting the literacy learning of young children and young adults in their first language. From my experience and study of

language learning I believe these same studies can serve as a strong theoretical basis for program planning in the teaching of ESL.

An important book which helped me to understand a broader meaning of literacy was Robert Pattison's book, On Literacy (1982). Pattison opens the preface to his book with the statement, "we are inadequately literate in part because we have inadequate ideas about literacy" (p.5). The essence of literacy for Pattison is not unlike that of Paulo Freire (1970) which is to understand the relationship of language to the world. He says: "Literacy is something bigger and better than mechanical skills of reading and writing ... Literacy is a potent form of consciousness" (p. x). I believe that it is this important concept that would be beneficial for adult educators to understand. Teaching new immigrants, unfamiliar with their new culture, requires more than just teaching word recognition and grammar in isolation. ESL teachers need to win the trust of their students and empower them to take risks in not only learning the new language but also the new culture. On Literacy which is a well researched book, challenges the educational system and teachers everywhere "to enlarge their perception of literacy and to provide more humane forms for intellectual development for students and adults" (p.212).

In the past two decades the research of many educators illuminate the critical importance of the writing experience of young children as a way of making sense of their world. James Britton's early work with children's writing as a way of making meaning has been the basis of many successful teachers' language learning programs in their classrooms. Britton (1970) points out how people have, from very early times, tried to use their past experiences as a way of giving meaning to their present experiences and also as a way to anticipate the future. The key for a person's efficient organizing system based on past and present experience is language. "Language... is the 'key way' of representing experience. ... We habitually use talk to go back over events and interpret them, make sense of them in a way that we were unable to while they were taking place" (p.19).

Britton (1982) distinguishes three major functions of writing and labeled them

"transactional", "expressive" and "poetic". In this study I have concentrated on his theories of expressive language. He describes expressive as "utterances that rely on an interest in the speaker (or writer) as well as what he has to say about the world" (p.123). He also characterizes expressive writing as deriving much of its importance from being "primarily written-down speech". He goes on to say:

> Expressive forms of speech capitalize on the fact that both speaker and listener are present: expressive writing stimulates the co-presence, the writer invoking the presence of the reader as he writes, the reader invoking the presence of the writer as he reads. ... and whether we write or speak, expressive language is associated with the relationship of mutual confidence, trust, and is therefore a form of discourse that encourages us to take risks, to try out ideas we are not sure of, in a way we would not dare to do in, say, making a public speech ... expressive language is a form that favors exploration, discovery, learning (p.124).

Britton (1982) defines expressive language as "language close to the self" (p. 96). He goes on to say that expressive language is "relaxed and loosely structured because it follows the contours of the speakers' preoccupations...it is also the language in which we first-draft most of our ideas" (pp. 96-97). Britton reminds us that writing involves not only communication. In addition to communicating, "There is always an element of 'finding out', of 'exploration'" (p. 110). Writing helps us to organize our thinking and, as Britton suggests, "it can be learning in the sense of discovery" (p. 110).

Britton places a great emphasis on expressive writing and how it lends itself to reflection. Expressive writing is that used in journal writing. It is the type of writing I have found gives adult ESL students that confidence to write for understanding, meaning-making and for English language learning.

Frank Smith's many research studies over a period of 30 years into how children learn to read and write have also provided me with a theoretical framework for my investigation of the use of journal writing for adult students. Smith's important contribution to our understanding of literacy was when he made the connection between a child's spoken language and a child's learning to read and write, as he observed:

> Children in the first few years of their lives know how to learn to read and write because written language presents them with problems similar to those they solve with spoken language, and that social interaction is required to make learning literacy possible (Smith, 1984, p. 143).

Smith goes on to say that children require a [particular] kind of interaction to become literate. He characterizes this interaction as "an apprenticeship, or engagement with relevant demonstrations" (p. 143).

An important theme running through most of Smith's theories about children learning to write is social interaction and the proper environment for learning to take place. Also important in the learning process are the relevant demonstrations provided by the teacher. Demonstration becomes one of the conditions for learning. He points out that a demonstration is an example of something being done, and of how and why it is done. He indicates that demonstration alone is not sufficient for learning to take place:

> For learning to take place there has to be an engagement with a demonstration as direct and immediate as the manner in which gears engage in a mechanical device (Smith, 1982, p. 171).

Engagement by the student is essential for learning. Engagement involves the student alone with the text or his previous experiences, it also involves the teacher in the learning process. The teacher provides the environment in which the child learns. "The environment in which a child will want to write is an environment of demonstration" (Smith, 1982, p. 201).

For written as well a spoken language to occur, Smith (1984) believes it "is essential for that which is demonstrated to be something that learners will want to do and will expect to be able to do" (p. 151).

Engagement in its many forms is an important factor in my teaching. But engagement

will only occur if there is sensitivity. Smith (1983) defines this kind of sensitivity as "the absence of expectation that learning will not take place" (p. 108).

I realize that writing at any level is a difficult task and especially, as Smith (1982) points out, when composition and transcription can interfere with each other. Composition, the writing of the text, takes priority over the mechanical skills involved in writing. "Composition and transcription can interfere with each other. The more attention you give to one, the more the other is likely to suffer" (p. 21). Smith says, "The teacher of writing can resolve this conflict between composition and transcription by separating the two and making transcription come last" (p. 24).

Another important theory of Smith's which supports the way I teach writing, especially journal writing, is his concept that learning is primarily a social rather than an individual accomplishment. Smith (1988) uses a new metaphor for learning which he calls *the literacy club*. As he says:

> We learn from other people, not so much through conscious emulation as by 'joining the club' of people we see ourselves as being like....One of the most important communities any individual can join is the "literacy club", because membership ensures that individuals learn how to read and write (p. vii).

Smith argues, "that children learn to read and write effectively only if they are admitted into a community of written language learners" (p. 2). He points out that the important aspects or characteristics of learning through membership in the Literacy Club is that learning is always (1) meaningful, (2) useful, (3) continual and effortless, (4) incidental, (5) collaborative, (6) vicarious, and (7) free of risk (p. 6).

How does belonging to such a club help children learn to read and write? Not by programs or formal instruction, but as Smith points out, "They learn - usually without anyone being aware that they are learning - by participating in literate activities with people who know how and why we do these things" (p. 9).

The role of teachers is not so much providing activities for children but rather "to facilitate and promote the admission of children into the literacy club" (p. 11). What Smith says about children's literacy learning can also be applied to adult learners of a second language. I like Smith's metaphor because I have provided my students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds the opportunity to join the literacy club of journal writers.

My concern was that no one be excluded from this community of learners because they were illiterate or lacked schooling in their own language. The result is, as my research shows, that the most inexperienced member of the club profits from the more experienced members of the club. My responsibility as a teacher is to guide my students toward literacy, and to demonstrate uses for writing. And of course as Smith points out "teachers must help children to write - not teach them about writing - so they can perceive themselves as a member of a club of writers" (p. 26).

The inspiration I received from Smith's (1988) book Joining the Literacy Club enabled me to take action in providing my ESL adult students with an environment for writing where they could take risks without fear of penalties or the big red pencil inhibiting their creative writing.

Expressive writing is the form of writing used in journals. It is the type of writing I have found provides adult ESL students with the confidence to write for understanding, meaning-making and for English language learning.

A very important work that undergirds my study of the use of dialogue journals to enhance the teaching of ESL is Terry Piper's Language and Learning, second edition (1998). Piper, who has had years of classroom experience and conducted extensive research in how children learn, declares that "there are more similarities than differences between first and second languages" (p.5). This statement is supported throughout the book by the numerous studies she has conducted in ESL teaching and the research she cites to support this claim.

Piper's experience as a teacher, linguist, and researcher has provided her with many insights into the nature of language development. She has witnessed "the growth of oral and written language in schools, growth directly attributable to the interaction among children and between children and teachers" (p.164). Her experience leads her to believe that nowhere is the importance of this type of interaction more obvious in students' learning than in ESL classrooms.

Piper points out that language is a subject that children know most when they enter school and that "language requires little teaching and children will learn if they are given the opportunity to do so" (p.310). For second language learners "the opportunities [for learning a second language] may have to be more numerous and more attention may have to be paid to meaning in the language they hear and see, but the process is natural enough if we do not impede it with over emphasis on structure and form" (p.310).

Journal Writing for ESL Students

Another researcher who has studied journal writing for language development and reflection on a new culture as well as a model as teacher-as-researcher in an ESL classroom is Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk (1998). In Conversations of the Mind: The Uses of Journal Writing for Second-Language Learners she discusses the results of her teacher research study in which "she chose to become an active participant in the research process" (p.3). Her work confirmed my own assumptions and experience about the use of journals as a powerful learning tool and their effectiveness in establishing a dialogue which leads to a better understanding of the students learning the language and culture of their new homeland. Her study with adult ESL students showed how qualitative inquiry can lead to a greater understanding of the teaching and learning transactions occurring in an ESL classroom.

Mlynarczyk points out the many advantages of conducting her study in her own

classroom. Chief among these were being able "to start from where you are" as well as having automatic access to "the richest possible data". She points out that only as a teacher could she have had such complete access to the total context (p.4). The principle sources of data for Mlynarczyk were the students' journals.

In her search of the literature, she discovered that studying the massive amount of research on teaching writing to native speakers could be valuable in her study with ESL students. She discovered that many researchers indicated that "skilled" ESL writers showed writing behaviors that were strikingly similar to those of skilled native-speakers (p.13). My search of the literature also examined the process of writing that leads to skilled writers in the English language and how such writing practices led to a greater understanding of language development both for reading, reflection, meaning-making and creative thinking.

It is this theme of writing as a way of making meaning that underlies a great part of Mlynarczyk's work. She points out that very few second-language educators encourage reflection in their communicative language teaching. She also notes how essential it is to "find ways to give students the time and space needed to engage in genuine reflection". One important way ESL teachers could provide the time for reflection would be the use of dialogue journals which are "a sort of conversation conducted in writing" (p.14).

Mlynarczyk also confirms my own practice in encouraging journal writers not to be concerned about errors in structure or grammar. She urged her students "to use the technique of free writing, to just 'think on paper' without stopping to edit their work" (p.164).

I learned from Mlynarczyk the importance of acknowledging one's basic values and beliefs in order to understand one's teaching practices more fully. "For a teacher-researcher, this means articulating and examining the assumptions underlying classroom practices" (p.34). In my study I'm cognizant of the fact that I follow a holistic style of teaching which is foreign to many ESL teachers and not part of their teaching style. I

believe in the concept of student-centered learning and I involve the students from the first day of class in group work and conversation.

Mlynarczyk's research has also reinforced my own belief as to the danger of the tendency of so many teachers "to make generalizations about students from different cultures". For example, many ESL teachers will state quite emphatically that "Russian students don't like small group work" or "Chinese students won't talk in a large group". There may be some validity at the core of such stereotypes but "If, however, generalized assumptions about different cultural groups are relied on exclusively without further thought, they can lead to an over simplification of the complexities of intercultural teaching and learning" (p.163).

Another study which helps to support my thesis is Writing Our Lives: Reflections on Dialogue Journal Writing with Adults Learning English edited by Joy Kreeft Peyton and Jana Staton (1996). The editors provide a book that is a straightforward guide to dialogue journal use. They point out that it is only recently that dialogue journals are being more widely used by adult educators. Peyton and Staton rely heavily on Paulo Freire's concept of the role of dialogue in learning when they point out that:

> The dialogic relationship between teacher and students, and among the students as peers, creates a social context in which the strange new language so long possessed only by others becomes a language possessed by and useful for oneself (p.3).

It is this dialogic relationship that I have been pursuing in my ESL classroom and which I will be exploring in greater detail in my study. Peyton and Staton(1996) found that many dedicated ESL teachers committed to using the social interaction process in teaching overlook the use of dialogue journals as an effective means to make reading and writing into acts of mutual social construction. One very important aspect of dialogue journals that is mentioned by various contributors to this book, and one which I have already alluded to, is that dialogue journal interaction creates a "context of equality and symmetry that leads to trust between learner and teacher" (p.4).

Peyton and Staton (1996) summarize a review of the most recent research which

underscored four needs of adult literacy education to which dialogue journals can contribute. They are the need for materials that are responsive to learners' lives and work, the need for more complex and functional materials, the need to transform literacy learning into a more dialogic process, and finally the need to enable the learner to become empowered and self-directed in the classroom (p.6).

Various Approaches to ESL Teaching Today

ESL teachers are usually preoccupied with developing vocabulary and grammar instruction and the result is all too often what Freire (1985) refers to in the teaching of reading "as walking on words"(p.15).

Current approaches to the teaching of literacy, developed by researchers and scholars whose theories support writing to learn, the social and cultural nature of language, the pedagogy of second language learning, and journal writing, have, for the most part, been overlooked or ignored by many ESL teachers and policy and curriculum developers for adult education programs. Instead, the main focus in many ESL programs has been competency-based which is functional in its approach. According to Crandall and Peyton (1993) this curriculum model emphasizes life skills and evaluates mastery of these skills according to actual learner performance (p.15). Performance and mastery learning are the most important aspects of this model and "each component of a competency-based program is designed, monitored and adjusted with one thing in mind – results" (Langenbach, 1993, p.38).

There are many other theories and approaches to ESL teaching and composition apart from the competency-based model, and each approach has its strengths and weaknesses depending on the objectives of the adult learning program. However, according to Woods (1995), until the communicative approach took hold in the 1970's, grammar was at the core of second language learning. In most cases the grammar syllabus was based around verb patterns. There were also other views of how grammar should be taught. For example, two approaches to the learning of grammar which were and still are

commonly used are deductive, where the teacher explains the rules and meaning to the learner, and the other is inductive, where learners are given many examples and derive the rules and meaning for themselves (pp.61 & 76).

According to Richard-Amato (1988):

> Many language teachers have felt that language teaching is facilitated by focusing on grammar as content and/or by exposing the student to input in the target language that concentrates on one aspect of the grammar system at a time – present tense before past, comparative before superlative,... and so forth (P. 9).

The approach to learning language that Richard-Amato discusses has been described as learning through a hierarchy of skills and sub skills. This view is directly counter to research theories that view language learning as an interactive social/cultural and active process in which the learning draws on his/her own experience to construct meaning.

Many theorists in language development such as Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1986) "who did not speak directly to second language pedagogy, did formulate ideas concerning learning and development in children that have important implications for second language teaching and the provision of optimal input" (p. 32). Richard-Amato goes on to say Vygotsky (1978) "was convinced that learning itself is a dynamic social process through which the teacher, in a dialogue with a student, can focus on emerging skills and abilities" (p. 33). Freire (1970) enlarges on this concept in Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Bruner (1986) also makes a convincing case for the social nature of language acquisition.

Richard-Amato (1988) discusses the significant contributions of many well known theorists to the understanding of first and second language acquisition. Based on these various theories and hypotheses she makes the following two assumptions:

(1) Although important differences must be taken into account, there are a sufficient

number of similarities between first and second language acquisition to support a common theory; (2) the classroom can indeed be an appropriate environment for language acquisition (p. 20).

Toward the end of the 1960's there was a move away from grammar as the center of language learning. The aim was to make the use of language the dominant feature. For example, in the communicative approach which became popular in the 1970's, little attention was placed on grammar and more emphasis was placed on communicative competence (Woods 1995, p.65).

Around the same time that this shift in language learning occurred, the philosophy and implementation of whole language theories became popular. Crandall and Peyton (1993) summarize the concept of whole language as follows: The term comes not from linguists but from educators who used it in reference to how children become readers and writers. Whole language teaching is not a method or a collection of strategies and techniques rather "it is a view of language and of teaching and learning, a philosophy of education" (p. 35). In this case language is viewed as whole (hence the name) and "any attempt to fragment it into parts, whether these be grammatical patterns, vocabulary lists, or phonics families destroys it. Language must be kept whole or it isn't language anymore" (p.35).

Whole Language was in fact mandated by several Canadian provincial departments of education. Quebec and Nova Scotia brought out language arts curricula mandating the teaching of whole language. However, after a few years, the concept of whole language led to the "great debate" or (whole language v/s phonics) in language learning that erupted in the late 1980's and 1990's.

The term whole language and its approach to reading was blamed for the poor showing on mandated tests taken by students in the early grades. Most school boards, therefore, abandoned the term and decided that a more integrated approach to reading and writing, including the direct teaching of phonics, should be followed. Yet whole language, if properly used, has much merit, especially for beginning readers and writers and, I

believe, also for ESL students. I feel if a balanced approach is used in which whole language is the focus along with teaching phonics this will provide a more complete language program.

Inspired by whole language theorists and the works of researchers such as James Britton (1970, 1982), Margaret Meek (1991), and Jerome Bruner (1986) I was struck by the fact that these studies rarely dealt with the teaching of adult students. Few research studies on literacy have investigated the context in which ESL students learn. However, I have been very fortunate to have discovered the research of Rebecca Mlynarczyk (1998), Joy Kreeft Peyton (1990), Jana Staton and Joann Crandall (1993) who have written and edited books on ESL teaching and learning and particularly dialogue journal writing with adults. However, research in adult ESL instruction where language is the focus instead of grammar, is still very limited and is an area where more research is desperately required.

While I found ample theoretical guidance for my study, I discovered very little primary research in language development through journal writing for ESL students. For this reason I decided to become a teacher researcher. It occurred to me that the use of dialogue journals in the teaching of new Canadians could be used both for the learning of the English language and communicating and learning about Canadian culture. I therefore became a teacher researcher in my own classroom.

The theories of Britton (1970, 1982), especially his model of literacy discourse and his concept of spontaneous shaping led me to think that the function of literacy discourse could be applied to new immigrants coming to Canada. His essay "Shaping at the point of utterance" confirmed for me the importance of journal writing, when he says:

> When we come to write, what is delivered to the pen is in part shaped, stamped with the image of our own way of perceiving. But the intention to share, inherent in spontaneous utterance, sets up a demand for further shaping (1982, p. 141).

The propensity for "sharing" and "future shaping" on the part of students and teacher could be accomplished by the use of a dialogue journal in the teaching of new Canadians. The dialogue journals could be used for both learning the English language and communicating and learning about Canadian culture.

Teacher as Researcher

The idea of teacher-as-researcher is not a new concept but originated with the work of Kurt Lewin in the United States following World War II. Lewin attempted "to derive general laws of group life from careful observation and reflection on the processes of social change in the community". Action research according to Lewin "consisted in analysis, fact-finding, conceptualization, planning execution, more fact-finding or evaluation" (Hopkins, 1993, p.45). Lewin's ideas were almost immediately applied to education, although very few teachers carried out this type of research. It was not until the late 1960's in Great Britain that the teacher as researcher gained prominence and respectability.

In Great Britain action research was considered more of an emancipating force for teachers and thus involved many more teachers carrying out classroom research. Lawrence Stenhouse (1984) proposed that teachers should become curriculum researchers and curriculum developers (p. 94). This led to the Ford Teaching Project (1973-76) which involved a large number of teachers in action research.

What is action research? Hopkins (1993), from his study of classroom research, says "Action research combines a substantive act with a research procedure; it is action disciplined by enquiry, a personal attempt at understanding while engaged in a process of improvement and reform" (p.44). Carr and Kemmis (1986) claim that the things that action researchers research and that they aim to improve "are their own educational practices, their understanding and the situations in which they practice" (p.80).

Mooney (1975) also believes the researcher to be central to any research when he discusses two views of research – the consumer's point of view and the producer's point of view. One of the problems of so much social science research, according to Mooney is that the research reports are written in the third person and "the personal reference to the research is left out" (p.177). In other words, the researcher is saying, "I am to observe but not to participate" or "I am not to be influenced by what I value" (p.178). Mooney, a teacher researcher in his own classroom, believes "that there is very little to differentiate a good teacher from a researcher since both are vivid inquirers" (p.201). As will become evident in the following chapter, I am both a researcher and a participant in my own research.

Glenda Bissex (1986) who has collaborated with many teacher researchers also believes, as she puts it, "A teacher researcher does not have to be antiseptically detached. He [she] knows that knowledge comes through closeness as well as through distance, through intuition as well as through logic." (P.483). She goes on to say that, "a teacher researcher is an observer, a questioner, a learner and a more complete teacher" (p.483).

Hundreds of teacher researcher studies in the past few years have shown how teachers have, through classroom research, improved their professional practice even though it is still looked on by many educator researchers as lacking rigour. Winter (1989), who has worked with and written extensively about the research carried out by teachers in their classrooms, accepts the definition provided by John Elliott who worked closely with Stenhouse in developing action research in Great Britain, as "the study of a social situation with a view of improving the quality of action within it. ... [The] total process – review, diagnosis, planning, implementing, monitoring effects – provides the necessary link between self-evaluation and professional development" (p.3).

Winter (1989) believes that action research is something that belongs to teachers. He contends that the phrase that describes the activity of the professional teacher is "practitioner action research". He goes on to clarify this idea further by saying "Practitioner action research is thus part of the general ideal which is already inherent

within the role of 'professional' worker. Practitioner action research is thus part of the general ideal of professionalism, an extension of professional work, not an addition to it." (p.4). He follows up on this, thereby pointing out that action research is about seeking a voice as he says, "Action research is about seeking one's voice, a voice with which to speak one's experience and one's ability to learn from that experience" (Winter 1998, p.54).

Winter (1998) also emphasizes that action research is about decentralizing the production of knowledge, thus "giving a 'voice' to practitioners ... and also helping others (our students) to find their own voices, to encourage them to speak out, to ask questions, to contest conventions and prescriptions including those of professional practitioners" (p.54). For me this is what makes action research such an important research tool for exploring journal writing with my ESL students. In chapter 3, I will discuss how I used elements of Winter's model of action research in my study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

> Whenever people decide to learn, they undertake research. If teachers wish deliberately to learn about their teaching, they must research.
>
> Goswami & Stillman (1987, p.8).

This study was designed to further understand the role of journal writing as a tool in learning language and culture for adult ESL students who are newcomers to Canada. Having taught ESL students for more than ten years I began to question my methods of teaching reading and writing and began to reflect on the possibilities of a better and more effective way of teaching English to adults from a different culture. Although I was teaching in a holistic way and making conversation the centerpiece of my teaching, I realized I wasn't giving the students sufficient time to hear their own voices independent of the whole class voice. I was already using journals as part of my language program and wanted to know more about their usefulness in teaching and learning.

Having kept a personal journal for years, I realized the immense value of recording my own experiences and reflecting and clarifying my thinking. I wondered whether such a practice could improve the reading and writing skills of my students as well as enable them to understand their new ways of living and working in a new culture. Therefore, I decided to examine the value of journaling with my ESL classes.

In the past few decades educators have tried to solve problems and test hypotheses and theories mainly by using two different basic methods of research – quantitative and qualitative. As Bruner (1996) points out, one method is not superior to the other. As he says:

> There appear to be two broad ways in which human beings organize and manage their knowledge of the world, indeed structure even their immediate experience: One seems more specialized for treating physical "things", and the other for treating people and their plights. These are conventionally known as logical-scientific thinking and narrative thinking (p.39).

It is this narrative mode which fits the qualitative method of research which I have followed in this study and which has proven to be a very appropriate way to research people's everyday actions within the context in which they occur. There are five characteristics of qualitative research outlined by Bogden and Biklen (1982) which I have followed. They are:

1. Qualitative research has the natural setting as the direct source of data. Although recording devices may be used, the researcher is the key instrument of data collection. He/she becomes involved in the study because of a concerned participation in the activity and process being studied.
2. Qualitative research is descriptive. Everything can have potential importance to the issue being studied.
3. Qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products.
4. Qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively. Theory develops from the bottom up from the many pieces of interconnected evidence that have been collected.
5. Meaning is of essential concern. Qualitative research seeks to understand how participants make sense of their lives, how they interpret certain experiences, and how they structure their world. Descriptions of these are very rich and detailed (p.28-29).

The qualitative methodology I used is that of action research or teacher as researcher. This type of research has won respectability in recent years in the research community and numerous books and journal articles attest to the benefits of such research to both the researcher and the potential recipients of such research.

Teacher as Researcher

In this study, the model of action research I have used is one put forth by Winter. Winter (1989, 1998) feels that within this pluralistic society the theme of action research is essential for the future. He says:

> Finding an authentic voice for us as practitioners and also for our students is identical with the theme of the professional role itself: in order to develop an understanding of our practice we must seek to empower our students and thereby empower ourselves on a justifiable basis. Professional work cannot simply be a process of expert prescription but must instead be a process of continuous learning (1998, pp.55, 56).

Winter also discusses Kurt Lewin's notion of action research which he says is also about mutual learning, and often (in one way or another) about conflict resolution within the delicate politics of a divided culture (p.57). In this context, researching, as James Britton suggests (1987), may be viewed by the teacher as an ongoing process of discovery and a part of the day-to-day work of teaching (p.15). Britton (1987) goes on to say, "teaching is something we do; research findings are something we come to know; development is the process by which we bring this kind of knowing into relation with this kind of doing" (p.18).

The 'educational' model of action research (emphasizing self-questioning) which Winter (1998) proposes does not in his words "mean that action research has a problem of 'lacking criteria'". On the contrary, Winter shows "how the overall purpose of 'finding a voice' and 'of thinking with others' requires a reformation of the main phases of the inquiry process" (p. 54).

Winter (1989) describes the "process of action research as a method of professional learning". He disagrees with critics who downgrade action research as "lacking vigor

and general significance in comparison with conventional research" (p.vii).

Winter's (1989 & 1998) action research and criteria model is one of redefining the inquiry process and consists of the following three major elements. These elements further served as part of the methodological framework within my own research study as a teacher and researcher.

1. Formulating the Problem

Winter (1998) says that, " action research starts out from the practitioner's sense of a practical problem" (p.63). What I sensed as a practical problem for my research was the need for improved ways for adult ESL students to learn English and to learn more about Canadian culture. I discovered, as Winter suggests, that the focus and scope of the inquiry that I had undertaken had continued to expand and to change. This, Winter (1998) says, is in contrast to conventional social science inquiry where "time is an enemy". In other words in conventional research the researcher wants to know what is happening at the moment and if something goes wrong with the data the researcher would need to start all over again. Hence, "time is an enemy." But for the teacher researcher "time is a friend":

> The progress of one's inquiry over time - noting what happens as different things occur, as the situation develops: all this is essential to the learning process (p. 63).

2. Data Gathering

The methods of data gathering are important "in order to 'monitor' the professional practice which has been placed at the center of the inquiry." The importance of the collection of data is to "....tell us more than as practitioners, we usually know ..." (Winter, 1989, p. 20). The data involves a combination of the following procedures: keeping a detailed diary; collection of documents relating to a situation; observational

notes of lessons, interviews, and so forth; questionnaire surveys; interviews, and tape-recording (Winter, 1989, pp. 20-22). He also stresses the point that "Action research data gathering involves not just the 'systematic' criterion so frequently emphasized by 'scientific' methodology but also a sort of interpersonal sensitivity" (1998 p. 65).

I was reminded of this point throughout the data gathering process with my students who reflected a wide range of diverse ethic backgrounds and varying political experiences and views.

3. Data Analysis - Theory

The central issue that arises out of the data gathering is how do we interpret and analyze the data? Winter (1998) believes the concept of 'theory' could be helpful. He points out that the word 'theory' comes from the Greek 'Theoria' meaning 'contemplation', 'speculation'. "In order to contemplate our actions we need to step back from them, to get them 'in view' (p. 66). Winter's ideas of the importance of thinking about the data and reflecting on the significance or asking "what does this all mean?" go further than the practitioner simply referring to "a body of existing published literature which provide us with an external interpretive framework". He suggests that practitioners, or as in my case teachers, who are doing classroom research create their own theory "rather than just using it" (p. 66). Winter (1998) says that "theoretical resources, therefore, can include the whole range of ideas which are available to us, through our education and our professional cultural experience (including novels, films, drama, religious texts) and the ideas of our friends, colleagues, students, ..." (p. 67). My own analysis and interpretation of data in this study included the established body of literature but also included many varied resources. Part of creating our own theory, is according to Winter (1998), carried out in dialogue as we make meaning with others. And, finally, Winter shares his philosophy with us. "For being theoretical in this sense is one way of feeling oneself to be alive" (p. 67).

The Participants in the Study

My overall group of participants was comprised of a total of 31 students whom I had taught in several different sessions. There were 10 males and 21 females, the largest group of which fell between the ages of 20 and 30 years (68%). The remainder ranged from 33 to 57 years of age.

The largest number of students (65%) were from the Far East (China, Viet Nam and Burma). The second largest group (26%) was from Africa (Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia and the Congo). A small representation was from the Middle East (Iraq and Lebanon) and eastern Europe (Poland) – 6% and 3% respectively.

The majority of these students (21) had been in Canada on average only 2.2 months before beginning this program. A smaller grouping of 10 students had been in Canada for an average of 3.7 years.

The students were all registered in Level 1 of the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program within the Continuing Education Program of a large urban school district.

Within Level 1 the students' levels of education ranged from (equivalent to):

no education - 13%
grades 1 - 6 (average grade 5.7) - 36%
grades 7 - 12+ (average grade 11.3) - 51%
Overall average for entire group - grade 7.8

The students' levels of written language development, based on the criteria used by Edmonton Public Schools in the document, ESL Program Guide and General Objectives (1988), for level one were as follows:

illiterate - 13%

low - 26%

intermediate - 42%

high - 19%

The students wrote an English as a Second Language (ESL) Initial Placement Test to determine in which level they would be placed. They were then tested weekly as well as writing a standardized test when they finished the course.

I selected 9 students' journals out of a total of 31 to use as the main data for my study. The 9 participants showed a wide range of proficiency in their oral and written language development. For example, according to the definition of the term "illiteracy" provided by LINC (which is consistent with Webster's Collegiate Dictionary), two of the students were illiterate in their own language as well as unable to read or write in English. The term "illiteracy" is defined in **Webster's Collegiate Dictionary** as "having little or no education; especially unable to read or write". Two students were functioning at a low level, three were functioning at an intermediate level and three were operating at a high level in their writing, reading and speaking. However, within this range all the students were at the beginning stages of fluency in their language development and were in a combined class of special needs and beginners.

In selecting the 9 students as participants in my study, I used purposeful sampling as outlined by Gall, Borg and Gall (1996):

> In purposeful sampling the goal is to select cases that are "information rich" with respect to the purposes of the study (and intended) ... to achieve an in-depth understanding of selected individuals (p.218).
>
> The sample size in qualitative studies typically is small. In fact, the sample size might be a single case. The purpose in selecting the case, or cases, is to develop a deeper

understanding of the phenomena being studied (p.217).

> Cases in qualitative research are selected by a purposeful sampling process. The particular case to be studied might be selected for various purposes, such as the following: The case is typical; it reflects the phenomenon of interest to an extreme extent; it is a deviant case of special interest; it is politically important. Also the nature of some cases makes it possible to define a unit of analysis that can be sampled (p.553).

The above characteristics of purposeful sampling explain the main reasons for my selection of these participants.

Two of the participants were illiterate students within the unit of analysis using replication logic (literal replication). In literal replication I am predicting that the next case to be studied will yield results that are similar to those that I or other researchers have studied (p.219).

In choosing two illiterate students I was able to show that although their circumstances and backgrounds differed they were both illiterate when they began the course and both yielded similar results. Both students made progress in their language development and gained confidence in using all aspects of the English language.

I selected two students whose cases were politically important. Both students were political refugees, one from Burma, the other from Iraq. The remaining six students in my selection were typical in their language development of students at the low, intermediate and higher levels.

Ethical Considerations

Permission to carry out this research was granted verbally by the students as well as in the form of permission letters. I followed the guidelines set out by the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants. I carried out this research as a natural part of the day-to-day teaching of English to new immigrants. The

students were willing participants and understood the purpose of my gathering samples of their work. It was clear to the students that if at any time they expressed a concern about my sharing any information gathered in this study I would respect their desires concerning their own writing samples. They were also free to withdraw at any time without penalty. (Please see Appendix A for permission letter.)

Data Gathering

The main sources of data I used to inform this study were samples of the students' journals, other assigned writing tasks and taped interviews with individual students. Other sources included interviews with other teachers and my own notes made daily as a researcher.

Journal Writing

The students wrote in their journals everyday and handed in their journals as soon as they had completed each entry. They wrote mainly about their personal experiences of the day-to-day challenges in learning English as they adjusted to living in a new culture. I gathered the journals regularly and read each student's entries carefully. I tried to respond positively to the students' journal entries and to make suggestions for further writing so they would be encouraged to write more and to take risks in their writing. I responded briefly to the content of what the students had written in a similar way that Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk suggests in her work in Conversations of the Mind (1998). For example, Mlynarczyk said:

> In my first letter of response to Cliff's journal, I praised his view of himself as a writer: "It is clear that writing is important in your life. I really loved the way you expressed your ideas about writing. ... In your next journal, could you write a little bit about certain pieces of writing that were especially meaningful to you? (pp.93-94)

At the end of the ten week session I photocopied the journal samples to use in further

analysis of the writing.

Other Writing

The students were also involved in writing other than in their journals. For example, they had assignments to write such as their response to a story they had read, forms to fill out or writing about a picture. I collected and examined samples of this other writing in order to extend my observations of the students' progress and interest in writing in other contexts.

Tape Recorded Interviews

Tape recorded conversations with individual students were an important data source. Through them I gained a further understanding of the students' perceptions of the value of journal writing in their ESL programs. The relationship of mutual trust that I had with the students helped them to be open and at ease in the interview setting. The interviewing time also provided the students with opportunities to ask questions and add comments to the interview questions. Transcribing and listening to what was said on the tapes allowed me to confirm my own observations that I had recorded in my field notes.

I combined two of the approaches outlined by Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) for use in open-ended interviews in qualitative research. I used the informal conversational interview which relies on the spontaneous generation of questions. I also used the standardized open-ended interview using a predetermined sequence and wording of the same set of questions to be asked of each respondent in order to minimize the possibility of bias (pp.309-310).

I posed standardized open-ended interview questions for biographical information as well as informal conversational interview questions in individual and group interviews with students in order to understand the students' life experiences, as well as their attitudes and knowledge about writing. (Please see Appendix B for student interview questions.) I also informally interviewed other teachers at the school who were also using journal

writing as part of their programs. (Please see Appendix C for teacher interview questions.) The data from these interviews served as further confirmation of my belief that there are many different ways to use dialogue journals in teaching students in ESL classes. The conversations with other teachers validated my findings that journal writing not only can serve as a means of the writer developing ability in written language but also confirmed the relationship between writing and thinking.

Teacher-as-Researcher Notes

Throughout the period of this study I kept a daily journal and summary sheet of observations of the students' conversations about their experiences in class along with notes concerning individual students' growth and progress in learning the language. I recorded comments made in group discussions about aspects of cultural adjustment such as encountering new customs and traditions. I made initial notes in point form and at the end of the day wrote more reflectively in my own journal. I discovered one of the benefits of my own journal writing was the way the writing helped me to make my observations and thoughts much clearer.

Analysis of Data

I examined the journal entries and other writing along with the transcripts of taped interviews for two main purposes:

1. for evidence of growth in oral and written language development

2. for evidence of journal writing as a way of understanding a new culture.

Written Language Development

I examined the samples of writing for indications of language development with reference to two main sources. These sources were as follows:

1. Student Writing Samples and Descriptions for Helping Writers Write. Teacher Resource - Grade K-9. (Edmonton Public Schools).

2. ESL Composition Profile (Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta). These descriptors included the following categories: Clarity, enticingness, and interest, content, organization, vocabulary, language use, sentence structure and grammar, style or voice and mechanics.

I examined the writing for indications of a student's own style and voice by looking at the choice of words, any use of idioms and the way the student put words together. This analysis sometimes revealed a sense of humor in the writing even at this beginning level of language development.

Understanding a New Culture

I wanted to know how journal writing was contributing to the meaning the students were creating of the experience of living and adjusting to a new culture. I began to identify the topics the students were writing about. I sorted and classified the journal entries according to topics and discovered the following five topics were the most commonly written about: the family, native country, Canada, learning a new language, customs and traditions.

I examined the journal entries not only for the topics but also for the patterns of similarities and themes from one student to another. These patterns and themes were abstracted through analysis of the writing samples. I used guidelines for theme analysis as outlined by van Manen (1990) in Researching Lived Experience in order to arrive at the meaning expressed in the students' journal entries. Kam's journal entry is an example of how I implemented this procedure:

Sample Entry

My native country name is Viet Nam. A country is smaller than other countries in the world. Viet Nam is a tropical country. There are four seasons in North Viet Nam and there are two seasons in South Viet Nam. The weather in North Viet Nam is cold. The temperature is 10 degrees. The high will be 0 degrees. On South Viet Nam, there are rainy seasons and sunny seasons. The weather is hot. The populations of Viet Nam over 70 millions. Viet Nam is poor but developing. Its expand agriculture

and develop heavy industry. There are many scenery beautiful. The people of Viet Nam are very laborious. It is lovely my native country. Welcome you to Viet Nam.

Procedure

1. Read what the journal entry is about and arrive at a topic statement (e.g. my native country).
2. Re-read the journal entry and concentrate on each sentence in an attempt to identify significant words or phrases that reveal meaning (e.g. people laborious, scenery beautiful, welcome).
3. Re-read the journal entry and ask, "What is this journal entry telling me?" (e.g. Kam is knowledgeable about Viet Nam).
4. Record a one-sentence theme from this particular journal entry (e.g. Kam is proud of his homeland). (Van Manen, 1990)

Transcripts of Taped Interviews

Another important source of data used in this study was the transcripts of interviews I carried out with the students. I transcribed 10 audio tapes into written text and analyzed the written text for further evidence of the students' experiences in adjusting to a new culture. During these interviews the students described their backgrounds, their family members and interesting details about their occupations in their native countries. I learned much about their customs and lifestyle as they contrasted experiences in their homeland and in Canada. The interviews revealed their attitudes toward learning a new language as well as their struggles as newcomers in Canada.

As a researcher I was concerned not only with the wide range of topics and themes revealed in the writing but how the students' choices of topics and thematic phrases related to the broader research questions that underpinned my study. I have presented these findings for further discussion in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Writing and Thinking in a Second Language

> Someone who speaks 'the same language' as ourselves but comes from another country with another culture, for example from Singapore or Britain ... has a certain difficulty because things which seem the same are not in fact the same ... But an even more difficult problem exists for those who change languages and culture.
>
> Laura Ho and Bruce Bain
>
> *Grade Expectations* (1995 p.42).

One of the major challenges I found in using journal writing as part of my teaching was accommodating the range of different needs of a very diverse group of students who were changing both their languages and cultures. They came into the program from a variety of different countries, bringing with them varying levels of formal education, different learning abilities, and different stages of English language development. The range of cultural origins within the classroom was enormous. For instance, the students I selected to be participants in my research study were from The Sudan, Lebanon, Poland, Iraq, Burma, Vietnam and China.

I have always valued cultural, linguistic and social diversity in the classroom and found it to be an enriching factor in the lives of the students as well as in my own life as a teacher. However, as well as teaching English, I needed to keep currently aware and extremely sensitive to the political climate that existed in their native countries. I also needed to understand any possible tension between the various beliefs and values that students experienced at home and in the school setting. For example, the day after I had organized the students into discussion groups of four, I was visited by one of the student's husbands who came to class to ask that his wife only be placed in a group composed of women because she was not allowed to sit with or speak to other men. This incident confirmed for me the important role of the teacher in structuring a multicultural

classroom in ways that would honor and respect the customs, attitudes, lifestyles and values represented by many cultures and at the same time help the students to learn the English language within the context of Canadian culture.

As I explored the students' use of journal writing, I found both similarities and differences in the way the students dealt with their writing. For example, there were differences in the way individual students went about their journal writing, and there were similarities in the topics they chose to write about. Then as I read and reread what they had written about, I discovered the writing revealed similar patterns and themes embedded in the text. Individual students demonstrated varying degrees of growth in their language development in areas such as vocabulary and syntax as well as in the use of appropriate conventions. All the students were very positive in their attitudes toward daily use of journals in their learning of English and in expressing their concerns and hopes for their new country, Canada.

The Students' Disposition Toward Writing to Learn

The students in this study were at the very beginning stages of learning to speak and to read and write in a new language. Their goals were to become literate in English and they had already demonstrated their willingness to work very hard to achieve this end. As a teacher of ESL students I knew the importance for all students to develop and maintain positive attitudes toward learning, and I knew how disposition can affect students' whole motivation to continue the struggle to master a second language. In order to grow in language competence and confidence through journal writing, it was important for students to find pleasure in the experience and to feel encouraged and positive in their literacy pursuits. I hoped that they would learn to enjoy writing and want to write even when they were not asked to do so. I wanted to know how the students were perceiving the experience as we went along, what they were learning about writing and about life as newcomers to Canada.

Getting Started

During the first few days of classes, I prepared the students for the task of keeping a journal. I explained the purpose, the procedures and the format we would use. I showed them how a Duotang works as a "book" to record their information and their ideas. In order to demonstrate how to write a journal entry, I modeled writing one about myself and read it aloud to them. The students at this point often expressed a serious concern for following directions of the teacher carefully and accurately. I have learned that most students from other cultures tend to show a great appreciation and respect for the authority of the teacher. They are anxious to please and try their best to understand.

Exploring Attitudes

Throughout this study I tried to remain as aware as possible of the students' perceptions and attitudes toward all aspects of writing. I knew that for many my approach to teaching writing through conversations, modeling and using dialogue journals to record and interpret experiences would be a new approach to learning in a school setting. I was not surprised when I sensed bewilderment on the part of the students during the first few classes.

I interviewed the students throughout the study and during these interviews I asked two specific questions concerning their journal writing. "How do you feel about writing in your journal?" and "Do you ever write in English outside of school?"

I also observed students' behaviors and I talked and listened to what they had to say, not only in their journal entries but in day-to-day conversations. I recorded these observations in my own journal.

Taking Risks

One of the first challenges as a teacher of students from many cultures other than Canadian was to introduce them to new and different resources and approaches to learning. Most of the students' previous experiences in school had taken place in their

native countries where the educational systems adhered to very traditional methods of classroom organization and lecture presentations by the teacher. They sometimes described childhood memories of silent classrooms where structure and strict order prevailed. The main mode of learning even a little English at an earlier point in their schooling was writing English words, memorizing and reciting the alphabet, grammar rules and naming words. I was reminded of Trang, one of my former students who is now at a higher level in the school. Earlier she recounted her experience learning English in Viet Nam. "We were not allowed to speak the language, only to write. I learned passive voice but when I came to Canada I could not find anyone who spoke passive voice English. No one could understand me and I could not talk with anyone for a long time." She had decided that learning English in her native country had been confusing, frustrating and clearly a waste of time. The strictly grammatical approach had not prepared her to communicate with fellow Canadians when she emigrated. Although she did not feel this earlier approach had been successful, she was at the beginning somewhat skeptical about a different approach that focused on talk as central to writing, on developing fluency before control, and where writing came out of the students' life experiences.

I have found that Trang's school experience in her native country was not unlike those of the students in this present study. The idea of choosing what to say and how to get down thoughts and experiences the best way they could without worrying about accuracy first was, in their eyes, a new and strange approach. It was a gradual process for them to trust me enough that they would take a risk and engage in this kind of free writing process as a means to learning about Canada and learning the English language.

Trusting the Teacher

Taking risks meant trusting me to follow through with my promise to accept their errors and to respond positively to their early attempts in writing a message in their journals. I tried to be specific in my written responses and to focus on what they had said rather than on how they had said it. My main purpose in responding was to support and encourage

the students to keep going. I sometimes asked questions in my responses and gradually I noticed that the students were trying to answer the questions. Then they began to pose their own questions as part of their journal entry. For example, Yin asked, "What do you think, teacher?" and "Do you like barbecue too?" Because I had shared with them my own interests and experiences outside of school, they were beginning to engage in conversation through their journal writing. I realized that these students were now understanding the purpose of the dialogue journals and seeing them as a way to communicate rather than as an assignment done for the teacher. Their journal entries often revealed their appreciation of my intentions and efforts to help them learn English. For example, Kam wrote, "You are my teacher. I like you because you are teaching us very hard." Other students let me know that I was also a friendly representative of Canadians. "Every people here are friendly. The first friendly people are my teacher." I was pleased to feel a bond developing among us which I knew would strengthen our learning together. The students' attitudes toward their studies and their impressions of Canadians were also proving to be generally very positive.

Students' Attitudes Toward Writing

I learned a great deal about the students' attitudes toward their writing and keeping a journal by reading their entries and observing their discussions. But I also discovered that they responded well to my asking direct questions within an informal interview setting. When I inquired about their feelings keeping a journal, writing entries everyday and sharing what they had written with others, I found that most students had a good sense of what aspect of writing they enjoyed or found difficult. They would all have agreed with Harrison (1986) who pointed out that "Writing ... demands a good deal, especially of the inexperienced learner-writer." He continued, "I am thinking here of writing which involves reflection, rather than of that writing which simply involves the modes of process and reprocessing information ..." (p.61). I am reminded of Hue, one of the students who struggled with writing personally and reflectively. He often mentioned that he enjoyed writing but found it difficult because "writing meant thinking and

thinking was difficult". Problems with spelling and grammar were often cited as major concerns for students who wanted to get their ideas down but struggled with knowing the letters and how to arrange them.

However, the group of students in this session were unanimous in the pleasure they experienced when they shared their writing with their peers. They were very proud of their accomplishments and when they looked over their completed journals they were often surprised at how much they had written. "Did I really write this much?" they would ask.

And finally I was interested to know if the students wrote in English when they were writing outside of the class time. I was pleased to hear that they now were beginning to use English in writing letters to their families in their native countries. Yin explained that she often wrote to a friend in English who was also studying the language. She added, "I sometimes write story in English if I can remember spelling and grammar." Mohamed said he wrote English words down at home so he could use them in his writing.

Although these students were very "inexperienced learner-writers" they found a great deal of satisfaction in journal writing. They knew that mastering the conventions of writing would take time and practice, but they continually assured me that they were more than willing to keep working toward this goal.

The Students

As part of my teaching and building a relationship with the students in the class I made a point of inviting them to tell me about their backgrounds, their experiences in their native countries and especially about their perceptions of Canada before they arrived in this country. I discovered throughout this study that the students' knowledge and perceptions of Canada varied according to their levels of education and experience in

their native countries. Their stories revealed not only the countries they were from but gave me a brief insight into their former lifestyles, families and reasons for coming to Canada. The following autobiographical descriptions of each student who participated in this study came about through tape recorded interviews I transcribed as part of the data gathering and analysis. **I have used pseudonyms for the participants in this study.**

Martha, a 48-year-old and mother of 7 children was a refugee from the Sudan who had lived in Cuba for 8 years until coming to Canada with her husband and 5 of her children. She came to Canada on November 18, 1997 and when asked what she knew about Canada before she came she replied, "Canada is very big country in the world, very cold in Canada." Martha, who was taking this class for the third time was illiterate when she began the program. She had never attended school in her native country.

Rachel, a 53-year-old immigrant from Lebanon, and mother of 5 children was the other illiterate student I selected. Rachel came to Canada January 7, 1993 and when asked what she knew of Canada before she came she replied, "Nice Canada, different from Lebanon. Here people speak English, school different." Rachel had also never gone to school and struggled with English when she first started my class.

Stanislaw was functioning at a low level. He was from Poland. He was also struggling with English but he had completed the equivalent of grade ten in Poland. When asked what he knew about Canada before coming he said, "Canada is very good ski and cheap money in Canada. Polish is no good money, no jobs, is easier in Canada." Stanislaw was 20 years old and married and his wife was Canadian. His wife was born in Canada and met Stanislaw when she went back to Poland for a holiday.

Mohamed was also functioning at a low level. He was a political refugee from Iraq and he had lived in a refugee camp in Saudi Arabia for seven years before coming to Canada. He came to Canada on November 6, 1997 and told me that before he came to Canada "I see in Canada freedom because I like freedom. I don't like my country Iraq because no freedom." Mohamed had finished the equivalent of grade nine in Iraq and then worked

as a welder in a refugee camp. He was hoping to do the same kind of work in Canada. He was 24 years old and single.

Abano was functioning at an intermediate level in his language development. He was 42 years old and a political refugee from Burma. He escaped from Burma and fled to Thailand where he lived for five years before coming to Canada. He came to Canada on December 10, 1997 and when asked what he knew about Canada before coming he replied, "In Burma there is shooting every day. Canada is very good country for human rights, very lucky." Abano came to Canada with his wife but his three children still live in Burma. Abano had completed the equivalent of grade six before coming to Canada.

Hue was also functioning at an intermediate level. He was from Vietnam and had lived in Canada for four years before starting this class. He came to Canada on June 16, 1994. When he was asked what he knew about Canada before coming he replied, "Before in Vietnam many friends say Canada is very good country and very cold." Hue was 26 years old, married and had worked as a machinist in Canada before he started this class. He had completed the equivalent of grade six in Vietnam.

Yin was from China and started the program at a mid to high level of English fluency. She was from China and had completed the equivalent of grade 12 there. She came to Canada on March 20, 1998 and said before coming to Canada, "I hear the weather is very cold and the people is very good." She was 24 years old and married but had no children. She started this class only one month after arriving in Canada.

Ali started the program at a mid to high level of writing fluency but still needed work on speaking and pronunciation. She came to Canada September 24, 1997 and said "Before I came to Canada my husband come to Canada say very cold and snow very big in winter. Summer very beautiful, picnic and holiday many game." She had worked as a tailor in Vietnam and had just joined her husband who had moved to Canada two years earlier. She was 24 years old and had completed the equivalent of grade 10 in Vietnam. Ali was living with her husband and his parents but they had no children.

Lai Sheng also started the program with a higher level of writing fluency. She was from China. She had come to Canada August 8, 1997 and said, "I know Canada very good country and I wanted to come so my son would have good education." She was 41 years old and married with a son in grade eight. Before coming to Canada with her family she had studied for two years at the college level. She also had several years of experience teaching Chinese at the college level as well as working as a reporter.

Kam was a single male from Vietnam. He came to Canada September 24, 1997 and when asked what he knew of Canada before coming he replied, "When I don't come to Canada yet I know has no war and has the industry in the world." Kam was 26 years of age and had completed the equivalent of grade 12 before coming to Canada. His language development was quite high and he excelled in his writing. Kam began the program at a higher level of writing ability than most of the other students.

Content of Journals

I examined the content of the journals in order to determine the following areas:

I. Topics written about

II. The meaning students created from their experiences

III. The student's language learning and development

I. Topics Written About

The students wrote on a variety of topics in their journals and it was interesting to note how many of the topics the students selected related to the universal components that are basic to all cultures. These components included the values, beliefs and customs so inextricably linked to who the students are as persons and how they see themselves and

others. As I examined the writing I identified a set of five main topics:

1. Family
2. Native Country
3. Interests and Hopes for the Future
4. Customs and Traditions
5. Features of Canada

1. Family

The topic of Family was one of the most recurring topics the students selected to write about throughout the entire study. The students' values and beliefs were embedded in their written comments about family members and events. Many students described the members of their immediate family here in Canada as well as relatives left behind in their native countries. For example, Lai Sheng wrote about her husband and son who now live in Edmonton and her brothers and sisters who still live in China:

> My name is Lai Sheng Xi. I am from China. I like Canada, I am a student. I am married. My husbnd's name is Pui. I have three sister. One sister name is Lifeng. One sister name is Lien. One sister name is Li Yen. They live in China. I have three brother. one brother name is Yang hong. one brother name is Yang Sheng. one brother name is Yang Shi. They also live in China. I have one son. His name is MoYang. He is 15 years old. he everyday in school.

Kam emphasized the large size of his immediate family which was representative of many Asian families compared to most families in North America. For example, Kam wrote the following description of his family in his journal:

> I have a big family, my father is died, my mother is living Edmonton, my parents have ten children, seven sons and three daughters. I have two brothers and one sister living in Vietnam. Four brothers and two sisters living in Canada. And me. My name is Kam Lang. I am single. I am living in Canada. My family is very poor so I try to do many things that is very good for my life.
>
> My first brother name is Hung Lang. He is married. His wife name is Ngoc Trin. They have two children, one son and one daughter. They are living in Vietnam.
>
> My second brother name is Dong Lang. He is married. His wife name is Trimh Guoc. They have two children, one son and one daughter. They are living in Canada.

Kam continued to introduce his brothers and sisters in a similar fashion and through his writing it became evident that he felt very close to his family. In another journal entry he wrote:

> On the weekend I think that's good. Because I have two meeting in our family. On Saturday, we went to Calgary to carried our mother back to Edmonton. She stay our home. On night Sunday, we went to the airport Edmonton. We carried our aunt. She come from America. She go to visit us. We are happy when we have two old women. This is a nice surprise!

Other students also wrote about their family in the context of ways they spent time together in the evenings or on weekends. Martha described a weekend with her daughter. For example, she dictated the following entry to her daughter who scribed for her:

> on Friday go church. On Saturday I braided my hair. It took 2 days. My daughter helped me. on Sunday I finish my hair.

Yin wrote about a weekend she spent with her husband. She said:

> I have a very good weekend. On Friday after school I go home. Then I go with my husband to dance. We have a good time. On Saturday I sleep until 9:00. Then my husband and I have breakfast. at afternoon my husband and I go to supermarket. We were buy very much food. On Sunday my husband and I go to we friend house to visit. It was very good.

2. Native Country

The students often wrote about many aspects of their lives in their native countries. They compared and contrasted these events with their lives in Canada by writing on subjects such as the weather, holidays, and schooling. And sometimes they provided glimpses of the tensions and difficult living conditions for those living within certain political systems. Lai Sheng wrote:

> My mother Land is China. It has 9.6 million square kilo metre of area, 56 nationality and 1.2 billion people. It has 5 thousand years of history. I was born and grow in northern China. the weather there is same as Edmonton the winter is very cold. people in China from graed one to graed nine don't have to pay money to go to school. because China has a good many people. minority of people can to university. I want my son going to unversity and to be well educated. so I quit the job that I like. my family imnugrated to Canada Last year.

The last journal entry Abano wrote was about his family and native country. It took him the entire session before he was able to feel confident enough to reveal more about himself and his situation. Although he talked a little about his family in the beginning it wasn't until the end of the session that he spoke and wrote of his children. In his final entry he wrote:

> I am married, my wife name is Chin Mya. I am from Burma. I came to Canada on December 10, 1997. I have 3 children, the children live in Burma. I live in an apartment Edmonton city. I am a revalty government.
>
> I live in Thai Land 5 years, I am a convict Thai government. May 27, 1976 I am a prisoner 9 month Thailand. I am against government Burma. I denounce in front of embasy Burma at Thailand. I like Canada because I am Canadian citizenship. Canada is a good country.

Mohamed, like Abano, didn't say too much when he first started the class but in an interview later he described his struggle for survival while living in a refugee camp in Saudia Arabia. I helped Mohamed to get down his ideas in written form.

> I came to Canada November 6, 1997 from Iraq. After grade nine I soldier. I joined to army in Saudia Arabia. I don't like being a soldier in Saudia Arabia. After that I was refugee Saudia Arabia 7 years in a refugee camp. I not working with the people of Saudi Arabia. Just we working in the camp with my people.

When I asked what kind of work he did in the camp, he replied:

> First time just sleep and eat like animal. Sometimes walk sometimes no. After that somebody come. if you staying for a long time you would be die or be sick. After that I become very tired. After that I work everyday. My cousin come with me and he teach me how to join make steel. then welder.

As the students talked about and recorded the experiences they had lived through before coming to Canada, they were reminded of the sharp contrast in lifestyles, political ideologies and educational systems that existed in their native countries and those in Canada. Using language in speech and writing to contrast and compare these differences was a way they were beginning to understand the changes in their lives as newcomers to Canada.

3. Interests and Hopes for the Future

Other topics that emerged through the writing were students' interests and hopes for the future. For example, Stanislaw combined writing about his weekend with his interests saying:

> My weekend was very wonderful. Friday after school I went shopping with my wife. On Saturday I and my friends from soccer went to help at bingo. I don't get home until 3:00 am instead of 1:00 am. We went to a bar. My wife was very worried and when I got home she was very mad. On Sunday the whole family went to church and then spent the rest of the day at home.

Kam wrote about his interests saying:

> My hobby is collect stamps. I were collecting stamp when I were twelve year old. At first, I economized some stamps when I like. This stamps, my brothers and my sisters gave me, my friends gave me too. Sometimes, if I have money, I bought some beautiful stamps or a new set of stamp. I alway bought new stamps because they were cheaper old stamps. I had some old stamps but like them very much. I only collect stamps for my life more happy. I don't rich for buy or sale stamps.

Students also wrote about their hopes for the future particularly in the area of work. For example, in discussing jobs Kam wrote:

> I was a cashier in Vietnam. I like this job because it was very light. But I didn't like do this long time because my salary was very low. It won't help on my life. I new come to Canada about two months. I will study English good, maybe I will study higher level, I think. Maybe I will study about mineral oil or petroleum or petrol. that is my hope.

Yin wrote:

> I hope can talk English very good and I finish school can for the good work. I hope I will be hairdresser. [A little later she wrote:] I am happy when I go shopping and talk to my mother in China. I am happy with my husbnd in Canada. My husbnd has good job. He is welder. My husbnd and I like to do meny things go to restaurant eat lunch then we are go to night club.

Clearly, many of the students saw their futures closely tied to their success in learning English. Speaking the language and understanding the ways of a new world and a new culture were seen as the door that would open up to greater opportunities for employment.

4. Customs and Traditions

Students contrasted and compared many of the customs and traditions within their native country with those they were experiencing in Canada. For example, they wrote about shopping trips, eating out in restaurants, and other forms of recreation. Hue described a long weekend in which he compared shopping for food in Canada and in Vietnam:

> On Saturday morning 10:00 AM, I drove my wife to go to work. In afternoon at 2:00 PM I pick up my wife went home. Afer shower my wife and I eating lunch. in evening my wife cooked dinner and wacth movie. On Sunday morning my wife and I went to eat dim sum, in the evening we went to restaurant, eat dinner and listen music. on Mondy Morning we went to supermarket bought food. In Vietnam peoples go shopping and go supermarket everyday because everything fresh buy food and clothes very cheap. At 1:30 pm we went to cinema watch movie. The name of the movie Deep impact. I do homework and clean up and watch news on TV.

Among the customs and traditions students brought with them from their native countries were descriptions of dating and marriage relationships, dowries, and weddings.

Martha wrote about marriage customs in Sudan saying:

> My father has 5 wives. In Suday this is normal. I think boy and girl should live with and family if they are single. Mother she cooking and your children. When I get married my husband gave my mother and Father 40 cows, so because of this it is very difficult to separate if we fight.

In an interview Martha continued to discuss marriage customs saying:

> Wedding this in the world everyone the same, but in my country different. In my country you look nice girl, you look and talk to girl, it is okay, come to my home, you go in the home, you phone the father the girl and them people come, they talk to the father, the girl. After the girl go okay .... you can marry you take, but no boyfriend, no. You take to home and family, the girl she come all the home the woman, the man, people they talk to cow, how much cow, 20, 30, 40, you talk how much cow you give woman family, mother 5 cow or 6 and brother and now all the family. Then she finish and talk all of the family they girl she take all of the cow to the home, then wife and man, man and woman okay married. But now no good. You see all over the world no good. Now you see in the Sudan cow dies and hungry and people die. You see, God very big in the world. He looks something what happens, where happens, people.

Yin wrote about China and marriage:

> In my country a woman is about 20 year old when she gets married. In my country a man 22 year old when he gets married. My country a man only one wife. This is the same in Canada.

In an interview Yin described her wedding saying:

> No party, only family, went to Hong Kong to get married in a temple. Just my husband and mother and father, not brothers and sisters. After that I go back to China.

Hue wrote about marriage customs in Vietnam saying:

> in my countres a woman got married 24 and 26 and men gots married 28 and 30. My contres sometime a men has two wifes.

In an interview Hue then described his Chinese/Vietnamese wedding in Edmonton saying:

> I married October 17, 1996. People is 130 and more. I get married in restaurant. In morning she white long whilte dress. In the evening, in the restaurant, different dress. Different color. Is a pink color. Morning is the white color and evening is pink. Women in China and Vietnam wear white in morning and pink at night.

When asked to describe a holiday or festival in their native country students wrote descriptions of various religious practices. Rachel dictated the following journal entry to her daughter who scribed for her. She explained the celebration of Ramadan as experienced within the Muslim community in Lebanon.

> Today we started fasting. This month of fasting is Ramadan. We don't eat from 7:00 am to 5:20 pm. We have a different calendar, moon calendar. Ramadan 3 days holiday. This holiday we visit and talk and moon cakes. We can't eat or drink for one month in the day. We can only eat at night. This is a holy month where all muslims around the world start fasting for 29 to 30 days. this month is very important because it was the time when the holy book called Quran came down on prophet Mohammed. Ramadan means a person gives, means a person has to be as good as they can be so God will forgive and reign.

Rachel wrote another journal entry about Ramadan. Again her daughter scribed for her.

> Ramadan is a holy month where all Muslims around the world start fasting for 29 or 30 days. This month is very important because it was the time when the holy book called Quran came down on prophet Mohammed (PBUH). Ramadan means a person gives their body a break from eating and it also means a person has to try to be as good as they can so God will forgive them for their past mistakes. Ramadan makes a person learn how to be patient and have control over their daily needs. Ramadan is a month to pray and ask for forgiveness from Allah. At the end of Ramadan the Eid will be decided depending on the moon so this year it's on Thursday. The Eid is a celebration for Muslims of their good work during Ranadan. Sweets and candy are served on the Eid to family and friends. Muslims also have to continue on doing good things like they did during the holy month of Ramadan.

Lai Sheng also wrote about an important festival celebrated in China. She wrote:

> In China August 15 is mid-fill day. Every years Aug. 14 day night moon very round. people go outsied near house eat mooncake Look at moon. Mooncake is delicious have some unt in mooncake. Mid-fill holiday has 5 hundred years of history.

Ali wrote about Vietnamese New Year:

> Vietnamese New Year is on January 29 this year. before the new year people will clean their home. On New Year day people wear new clothes and shoes and we get more one age. Children get money in little red envelopes "lucky money" and children will "chuk Nung Nam Moi" Year of the tiger and new year left is "Tu Nguyen Tong".

5. Features of Canada

Other topics the students wrote about in their journals focused on aspects of Canadian life such as modes of transportation, housing and food. They also commented on the physical features of Canada such as the size, the landscape and the variety of seasons.

Lai Sheng compared transportation in China with Canada saying:

> In Canada I think it is better to drive a car because it is more convnient to drive a car than to take the bus go shopping. In my native country China some people usually ride a bicycles, some people take the bus, some people ride a motacycles, some people walks and few people drive a cars to work. Car is xepensive in China.

Martha contrasted the housing in Canada with housing in the Sudan. In her journal she wrote:

> I live house. I live 6 people with my. hausband and 4 children. we have 10 rooms. we have kitchen, a diuiwg room, 2 bathrooms, 4 bedrooms and basement and a laundry room. I like my house. In Sudan we live in mang different houses because moved husband was teacher and we moved. These were government owned houses. The rooms the same but outside different, very big outside, very hot. The houses in Sudan outside because many people sleep in yard. There were no bugs because thare was no rain, different the house the cities.

Kam wrote about his first impression of Canada and compared his first Christmas with Christmas in Vietnam:

> Canada, a country is very large and very nice. this country, I very like. Of course, my brother and my sister living here, but I like best in Canada hasn't war. After that it doesn't has bush and a country cleanly, and a country has fresh air. Canada is a country has industry in the first world. The landscapes Canada very beautiful. The feef's Canada is very diliciious but I very like hamburger. What a dilicious hamburger.
>
> I like autumn too, many trees have gold leafs, that is beautiful and lovely, after the end. I like people in Canada. every people are friendly. The first people is my teacher. She is teaching me and us. She is teaching us very hard. She is a good teacher. I like you. Sorry, I don't like winter. But Canada is lovely.
>
> I like much Christmas too! Christmas will brings everybody happy happy than everyday, the children will most happy. Christmas has many trees, a real tree and an artificial Christmas tree. They both are beautiful. I think I like a real Christmas tree and an artificial Christmas tree. I like them both because a real Christmas tree can put outside the house and an artificial tree can put in our home. Like this, they are very beautiful on everywhere. The Christmas will come us, every house have a Christmas tree. So, my house has two Christmas trees, too. Like that, they will be beautiful for us. Happy New Year! Merry Christmas.
>
> In my native country TET (new year) is a big celebrate and Christmas is a big celebrate too but it is catholic. I am buddhism. So I like Christmas too because I had many friends were catholic. Christmas is a big their celebrate. we go to church. in church had activity very happy. they go to camp, they dance and sing, opera, sport, but I like best sport, because I helped them very much. because I am the Coach football for children under 16 at my village. I can horn blowing for soccer or volleyball. That is happiest my memory. It was memories still green.

Martha contrasted the seasons. In her journal she wrote:

> I like summer season. I like summer because the weather is nice and sunny. Sudan February, March and April are very hot, (plus 40C). May and June are Spring, July, Augut and September it rains, in Sudan rain and hot, no snow. In October cold and November and December, January cold and windy. (plus 20C).

However, Abano, who was also from a hot country liked the winter. He wrote:

> Winter is my favorite season. I like winter because winter is very nice. It is cold and usually snowing. I can do many for my studies in the winter. Besides I can watch TV to improve my spoken English. I can also go shopping and market. Not only that I can see the snow growing up too. I love the country Canada.

Abano continued in another journal entry about Canada saying:

> I did come December 10, 1997 to Canada. I am from Burma. I like conditions and freedom in Canada. Canada is a good country. Canada is very happy. Canada is the moest beautiful of the world. Canada is big country on human right.

Many students commented on the peaceful conditions in Canada compared with the countries they had left behind, the freedom they found here and the absence of war. In a discussion about war Abano wrote:

> In Burma there is shooting everyday. Canada very good for human rights, very lucky. Martha said, yes in Sudan war is 14 years, many people die. Hue said in Vietnam many people outside shooting. I am lucky, many people die. Another student in the class from Vietnam told how she had been shot in the head when she was only 6 years old. Mohamed wrote, In Canada I like freedom.

Discussion

The topics the students wrote about varied in length and in subject matter. It was interesting to note that the topics chosen at the early stages of journal writing were of a more personal nature than topics dealt with toward the end of the ten week session. The content at the beginning revealed a strong emphasis on the family setting. This topic included family members, the students' countries of origin and their respective role in their own immediate or extended families. After the students were more comfortable and experienced with writing and with the multiethnic group of students, they began to move beyond topics related to themselves in a very personal way and to write about a more distant topic such as physical features of Canada as a nation. This trend echoed Britton's (1982) words "the language is likely to move away from the expressive, further

away from the person speaking and a bit nearer to the actualities of the world" (p. 96).

II The Meaning the Students Created From Their Experience:

Patterns and Themes

As well as examining the writing to determine the topics the students wrote about I also continued the analysis with an intention to extract themes that might indicate what the students might be thinking and feeling about their experiences learning English and living in Canada.

In the process of working with the data collected, I read, reread and reflected on each journal entry in order to determine key phrases, words and statements that might reveal what writing about a particular topic might mean to the student. Was there a layer of meaning that went beyond the literal topic? What was the message the students' words were revealing? These were questions I asked as I carefully examined the writing while following the guidelines put forth by VanManen (1990) outlined in the previous chapter.

The following themes emerged from the data:

1. Aloneness
2. Hard Work
3. Optimism
4. Identity

As I read the completed journal of each student I could see how all of the patterns and themes flowed in and out of the writing as a whole. However, for the purpose of discussion I have dealt with each theme separately. Already as a teacher researcher I was learning more and more about my students – who they were, how they felt and how they perceived this new country.

1. **Aloneness**

I miss my family, friends and native country.

Lai Sheng wrote about the times she was alone when her husband had to return to China. She felt lonely when she thought about her lack of friends here in Canada and remembered how in her native country she had people calling her.

> My name is Lai Sheng Xi. My family imnugrated came to Canada in last years Aprtil 8. My husbnd name is Pui. We live in Edmonton of an apartment. We have a son. His name is Moyang liu. He is student grade 8, he goes to school 5 days a week. Beforer came to Canada, my husband's business is don't finisn in China, so he must often return China.
>
> I am studying English at the Annex. I walk to school. I like learning English at school Then I stay home I feel lonliness, because I don't have friends in Canada, no people talling for me.
>
> My husband and my son like Canada. my son very hapy every day. I think somedy I also like Canada.

Even though Ali was making some new friends at school, she longed for her family and friends in Viet Nam. She was somewhat consoled by the fact that she was in touch by phone and letter writing. Ali wrote:

> My family living in VN. I was born in small city. My parents living in VN. I have four sisters and five brothers. Everybody too go to work. They are very happy and have good time. I sometime write letter and phone ask visit about my family. In Canada I living with my husband and his parents in a house. I don't have friends over here. When I come to school I start have some teachers and some friends but my teacher teach for me name is Joanie. I very thanks her did try teach for me. Thanks My teacher.

Kam, like so many newcomers, felt more homesick at Christmas time. While he celebrates the holidays with his family in Canada he was reminded of his brothers and sisters in Viet Nam. He shared his feelings with others and was committed to staying in touch with cards and letters. Kam wrote:

> The Christmas will come with us. We are happy. I am too but I remember Christmas in Viet Nam so much. In year, the first time I enjoy Christmas in Canada I think, I will have many surprise but never mind, because I have a big of my family in Canada. I get together with my brother and sister, we have a potluck dinner. I go for a walk. I talk to someone about how you feel .... I will send Christmas Cards to my friends in Vietnam and I will write letters to my brothers and sister in V.N. I write letter in English for them. I feel happy at Christmas. I am not alone. I feel lonely on holidays.

Ali also described how lonely she felt on holidays and weekends. She wrote:

> This weekend I was sad too. Because I don't went. I stay home work everything. I wash my clothes and write letter for my parents in Viet Nam. I met my husband go in the West Edmonton mall bit I don't bought everything only many photogrphs memory for Christmas.

Although many of the students felt lonely especially on weekends and holidays, they also were glad to be busy going to school to learn English. School provided them with a social life in the classroom and the opportunity to meet friends from other cultures. They enjoyed the English classes and particularly the journal writing within the conversational setting. However, they also described how learning another language was very difficult and hard work.

2. Hard Work

Learning English Is Hard Work

The students realized the important role that journal writing played in learning to write English. They felt that their English skills improved with writing, especially in the area of spelling. While they found the experience of reading, writing and speaking in English difficult and hard work, on the whole they remained unstressed and enjoyed the tasks.

Kam wrote:

> I like to write in my journal, because, This journal helps me to write English. I did write English better when I wrote my journal with Mrs. Joanie O's class. It helps my spelling difficult. It helps my spelling and vocabulary. I feel happy and relax.

Hue wrote:

> I like Spelling, Talking. journal & computers. Journal writing, writing letters easy but thinking difficult. Sometimes talking, sometimes listening difficult.

Martha wrote:

> I like red, write, listen, talk, language lab, library, journals, computers, spelling baseball and bigo. For me reading is very difficult. I study at home, sometimes my husband and children help me. I like writing and talking best. I think spelling and reading most difficult.

Ali wrote:

> I very like write in my jornal. Maybe it help for me understand very much English and remember many vocabulary when I homework and write jornal. It help me spelling difficult. It will help spelling and vocabulary. I feel happy and relax.

The struggle to adjust to a new culture with its own history, customs and traditions as well as a change in the language was not an easy one for most students. Yet the hard work was considered worthwhile in their eyes because they were optimistic that the outcome of learning English would open doors for future employment opportunities.

3. Optimism

Learning to Speak English Will Lead to a Better Life

My work with immigrant students confirmed the findings of researchers concerning immigrant families' attitudes toward furthering their literacy development. For families new to Canada, learning to read and write in English is seen as key to their employment opportunities and to their improved lifestyles. The students' journals revealed an

optimism toward future jobs and changing lifestyles as a result of their hard work studying English.

Stanislaw wrote:

> I am from Poland. I was a brick layer. No I am in Canada. When I finish school I can be start job a brick layer. Poland is problem job. Canada very good job mashen emergense and ep many car. Good mone job.

Martha wrote:

> I am from Sudan. My husband is from Sudan. I have seven children. I am never go to school but now I am go to school everyday. Now I go to school to learn English. Now I am very happy. I am happy to come to school I want to learn English. After school I think can go to work. I would like any job.

The students emphasized not only their positive feelings about learning English as a means to future employment, they also indicated their desire to become recognized and contributing members of Canadian society. This interest in learning a new language and becoming involved in a Canadian way of life was always accompanied with an expression of the need to maintain their own cultural background which was the root of their individual identity.

4. Identity

I Am Proud of My Cultural Background

The students frequently referred to their own cultural backgrounds, their religion, habits, preferences and traditions with fondness and nostalgia. Their journal entries revealed much about what they thought about, what they did and the beliefs they held.

Kam wrote:

> On the weekend I had a very nice weekend. On night Friday I stayed home. I watch Vietnam's music and film. On Saturday I went to Calgary with my mother and brother. We visited my brother. on night Saturday, we had Vietnam's food. It was very good.

Kam's later entry:

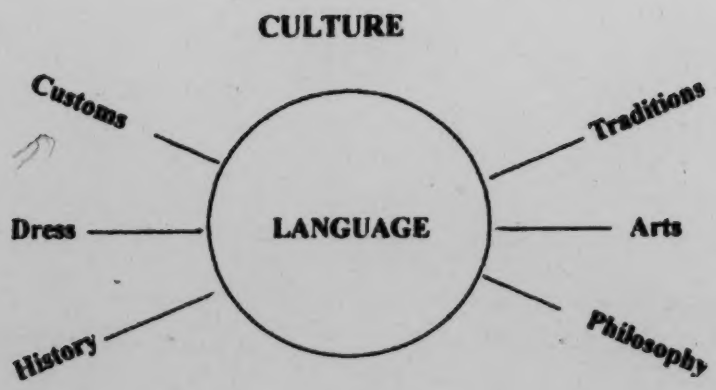
> In Vietnam, There are many celebrate's days importans and full of animation. But I like clebrate's days:
>
> *November 20: The pupils presented new years's day gifts to their teacher. At the time, teachers and pupils very happy. They organize a merry music. They making party for their class. They go to picnic. The pupils come back to old school. They visited their old teachers. The animated atmosophere of celebrate are happy and moved. The teachers are moved by the solicitude of pupils.
>
> *August 15: (lunar calendar). The mid-autumn festival, at the time. The harvest moon is round and bright. The children are happiest, because all will get presents. Almost they like glass huricane lamp-shade than "moon'cakes"
>
> *New Year oin VietNam tried the mooncake. It is delicious. The most important festival of the year is TET. Tet rings in the new year. Everybody are happiest. They wishing each other happiness, luck and prosperity. They worship the ancestors. They have some favourite foods. The children have money by old persons. They go to pagoda and they go out. They come to their relations and their friendly. Now in Vietnam, Everybody is waiting on animal will be born. We knew, that is a tiger. Who will born on this year, that is age of tiger. I remember new year in Vietnam very much. I will wear new clothes and shoes. Thank you Mrs Joanie Parker Happy new year

Lai Sheng wrote in her journal everyday during her Spring Break. One day she described her trip to the library with her son saying:

> On Tuesday I get up at 9 o'clock. I cooked and have breakfast. Then I practiced typeing on my computer for an hour. in afternoon, my son and I went to Edmonton Public Library reading some Chinese books. at four o'clock come back home. I cook rice and vegetables for my dinner. at night I watched TV for Long time. Then I go to bed have a good night at 11:00 pm.

This final theme of identity I have described was an important one for the students in my

study. The desire to hold on to traditional family values and beliefs and to maintain a first language while learning another was a constant challenge to immigrant families. They sometimes described themselves as people who were living in two worlds; one world a memory of lives gone by and the other a dream of possibilities yet to come.



Summary of Chapter 4

Throughout this study I became more consciously aware of the tremendous diversity of cultural backgrounds represented in this group of students in my ESL classroom. They came from different countries with varying traditions and varying political and educational systems. Their interests, values and beliefs also varied. Yet, when it came to choosing topics to write about in their journals they selected many of the same aspects of their lives to describe and discuss in written form. They wrote about their families, the customs and traditions in their country of origin and in Canada. They described their interests and hopes for the future. I discovered that embedded within the text of the journal entry subject matter the students were expressing similar themes. These suggested feelings of loneliness being so far from home and a strong desire to maintain their own cultural traditions even though many had chosen to come to a new country. Others came as political refugees. However, the themes of optimism and the willingness to persevere through hard work also emerged.

The students' positive disposition toward the writing task was an important factor in their agreeing to write personally and reflectively in their journals. They developed a trust in me as their teacher to help them to learn English in ways that often were contrary to the more traditional methods of teaching they had experienced in their earlier schooling. I discovered that by carefully reading and reflecting on the students' writing I understood more about them as individuals which helped me to try to meet their needs in learning English and Canadian culture.

Chapter 5

The Students' Language Learning and Development

One of the purposes of this study was to explore the use of dialogue journal writing in furthering the development of my ESL students' written language learning. All of the students had come from countries where learning to write was part of the school curriculum and where writing was taught as a useful tool for communication. However, Smith (1982) reminds us that while these "cultures have developed writing systems of their own or have adapted the writing systems of other cultures... these systems were usually very different from the forms and graphics the students were exposed to in the western world" (p.8). Therefore, for my students the task of learning to write in English meant not only learning new words and their meaning but learning new graphic forms, new ways of putting them together and sometimes learning a different directionality of print. I went about assessing the students' growth in learning to write in a number of ways that can be categorized under the general rubic of informal assessment. Bainbridge Edwards and Malicky (1996) point out that "...this type of assessment, in contrast with formal testing, is part of instruction. It is not separate from the teaching/learning process and, hence, does not take time away from instruction the way standardized testing does... It occurs across the entire language arts program including talking, reading, and writing" (P.369).

As well as observing and talking with students as part of instruction, I collected samples of the students' writing in their journals throughout the entire session they were enrolled in my class. I approached the task of assessing the writing from a holistic perspective. I read the samples to determine the overall meaning the students were attempting to convey. In other words, I concentrated first on "what they were saying". I also focused on the students' growth over time in their ability to use language in various ways. My approach was to monitor and describe what the students were demonstrating they *could* do in writing rather than focusing on correctness or the number of errors. It was

interesting to note that when students were trying out new ideas such as experimenting with using new vocabulary or syntax, they appeared to regress in knowledge or skills learned earlier. However, in analyzing the writing further I found this regression was usually temporary.

I then continued the analysis by examining specific elements of the text construction in order to describe the development of the students' writing.

The Edmonton Public Schools Writing Samples Handbook (1986) and ESL Composition Profile (Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta) contain the following criteria of elements which I have used to describe the students' writing samples: amount of writing, content, organization, sentence structure, vocabulary and mechanics.

Amount of Writing

The amount of writing each student produced varied according to their interests, experiences and their ability to put down their ideas in written form. However, all of the participating students showed growth in their language development over the course of the ten weeks. The growth in volume was determined by counting the number of words the student wrote in the first journal entry and comparing it to the number of words the student wrote in the last entry.

Content

As I described earlier under the heading of "topics the students wrote about" the content dealt with subjects the students selected. Some students presented ideas and information in a very concrete and straight forward manner with some elaboration while others developed an idea more fully and provided more detail. Although the boundaries were not clear-cut, a number of different language functions such as describing, reporting and expressing opinions emerged in the data.

Organization

There were some students who were at the very beginning stages of writing in English. These students' early entries were words in list form while the later entries indicated a gradual move to left - right directionality. The ability to organize ideas in logical sequential order was noted later in their development.

Sentence Structure

Among the students' journal samples, a pattern of sentence structures emerged that ranged from simple to complex. In the case of the two students who were illiterate in their own language they began with words and progressed to simple sentences.

Vocabulary

The students' mainly used basic concrete nouns and simple verbs in their choice of words. As their oral fluency increased so did their attempts to integrate new words into their writing.

Mechanics

The standard conventions of written language such as spelling, punctuation, capitalization and grammar were least evident in students' early writing but grew through continual practice and instruction.

In order to discuss the growth in the language development of each of the participants in this study, I have selected specific samples from each of their journals. Because the language and literacy competency level varied tremendously among the students when they came into the program, I have provided a brief overview of their experience at the beginning of the study and their level of achievement at the end.

Martha

Martha was illiterate when she began the course. In class she was able to copy from the

chalkboard but with numerous errors in spelling and punctuation. She began with preliteracy work as well as working with the rest of the class when they did their journal writing and other exercises. Her speech indicated a higher level of development than was evident in her writing. In both the first journal entry and the last in the study, the students wrote about themselves. Because Martha was in my class three times I selected her first journal entry in the first session and compared it with the one she wrote in the third session. Martha showed a marked increase in the amount of writing she produced and in her ability to attempt some of the conventions within the craft of simple sentences.

Amount of Writing

First journal entry (Feb. 4/98)	Later journal entry (July 6/98)
- 5 words	- 47 words
suldu	My name is Martha Abugar
country	I came to Canada on Nadmber 19, 197
Famly	I m student
Cildren	I am married
chool	My husdband's name is Jok
	I have 7 children I have 7 sisters and 10 brothers
	I like to do crochet
	I to do church
	and go shopping

The above example indicated Martha's progress as she moved from words in list form to simple sentences.

Content

Early entry (Feb. 9/98)	Later entry (Aug. 17/98)
wash	Friday go church and family come
cook	Calgary Saturday go to Safeway cook
friend	food Sunday cook family go to Calgary
vaccume	then cleaning
iron	
wash clothes	

In each journal entry Martha was describing a weekend. In her early entry she could only copy the words from a picture dictionary. In her later entry she was able to identify specific times and places and present a simple description of her activities.

Organization

Early entry (May 18/98)	Later entry (Aug. 5/98)
I live house I live 6 people with my 10 room I like my house	I live in a house with my hausband and 4 children. we have kitchen, ciuiwg, 2 bathrooms 4 dadrooms bsement and laundry room In the Sudan we lived in a mang different houses because moved husband was teacher and we moved. These were government cwned houses. The houses in because many people sleep outside in yard. There were no bugs because thare was no rain.

In both journal entries Martha described her house. In her early entry she had a good awareness of ideas but lacked detail. She presented a very concise short description. In her later entry she moved smoothly from one idea to another within the topic and her ideas were clearly stated.

Sentence Structure

Early entry (Feb. 6/98)	Later entry (July 30/98)
1 carton 2 container 3 bottle 15 lub (tub) 15 lube (tube)	I buy Food I buy safeway meat and chicken (Aug. 18/98) I like to go shopping and look in the stores I and happy when my family is together

In both Martha's early and later entries she was talking about shopping. In her early entry she was able to copy a list of words from the picture dictionary. However, in her later entry she was able to write using simple and compound sentences.

Vocabulary

Early entry (Feb. 17/98)	Later entry (Aug. 10/98)
T like nose (snow)	on Friday I go church I stay home clean my house Sunday frieds come my house

In the first journal entry Martha had very little knowledge of English vocabulary. She attempted the word snow even though she didn't know the spelling. In her later entry she expanded her vocabulary although her range was still limited.

Mechanics	
Early entry (Feb. 17/98)	Later entry (July 16/98)
T wan learnn English	Today we go downtown to Edmonton Centre we see many people dancing in cars on horses and playing music is very good I see a small plane and real horses square dancg

Martha's early journal entries indicated very little mastery of conventions. For example, her early entry consisted of 4 words and only two words were spelled correctly. However, her later entry was much longer. Here she still had spelling and punctuation errors as well as run on sentences but she was using upper and lower case letters correctly.

Rachel

It was difficult to assess Rachel's progress in written language development because she would often have her daughter scribe for her at home. She also received assistance from other students in class and from me. Rachel was in my class twice and her early journal entries were similar to Martha's. She could only copy print from the board and her copying was often full of errors. However, Rachel had a slight advantage over Martha as she had lived in Canada almost 5 years before starting this class whereas Martha had only been in Canada 2 months prior to her enrollment in this class.

Every morning a different student would go to the board and write the morning message along with a question. The other students would copy the message from the board into their journals and answer the question orally as well as in writing. Rachel would also copy the message into her journal. Then half way through the second session she suddenly got up in front of the class one morning and confidently stated that she would like to write not only the message but also an accompanying question on the board.

Amount of Writing

Early entry (Nov. 18/97)	Later entry (April 15/98)
- first journal entry; 19 words	- last journal entry; 32 words
My name is Radhde Yesseri From Lebanon I am married I hove J dugAleJ our one son	My Storg My name is Rachel Yesseri I am from Lebanon I came to Canada on Jonudry 1 - 1993 toilor I hahave five children four girls and a boy. I like sho pping

The above samples indicated Rachel's progress as she moved from incomplete sentences to simple sentences. Although Rachel attempted each journal entry on her own she often received assistance with her writing as well. Later, on her own, she returned to this sample to edit and add a title to the entry.

Content

Early entry (Dec. 2/97)	Later entry (March 9/98)
I om trom Lenanon. I was a uilor	Live on opartment
I liked my job. I was a gwarjas uou t cm in Canada I don't wont fouurk. I xstwont to visit	adovess 33, 103, 20 95A S t5E-4A2

In Rachel's early journal entry she received help from another student as well as copying the print from the board. With this assistance she was able to sequence her points as she drew on her oral language. In her later entry she wrote independently, although she was only able to produce words and phrases.

Organization

Early entry (Dec. 18/97)	Later entry (Feb. 19/98)
I vist friends I cat Christmas diner with my family We eat tarkey I gne presnts ta my friends and eat cataloupe ca lounch on yyapes apples Ond pizze 7up pepse	Rachel Yesseri Lebanon Jonudry 1 - 1993 tailor I No Job want to do shopping

In both journal entries Rachel had an awareness of some form of presentation of ideas. However, in each entry she presented her ideas without any indication of knowledge of sentences or uniformity of print.

Sentence Structure

Early entry (Dec. 15/97)	Later entry (Feb. 14-16/98)
Saturday sho pping tomorrowow son come Montreal	TU5 at West Edmón I buy pissa chicken sleep wash clathes

In Rachel's early entry she was unable to follow the subject - predicate pattern. In her later entry she was able to include subject and predicate although it was presented in a list form. Rachel's knowledge of sentence form was growing.

Vocabulary

Early entry (Dec. 16/97)	Later entry (March 18/98)
Co shopping ivis t stay in home cookiug Wes t Edmontan Mall	would like to live in Quebec because it is Monteol nice mot very cold hots. of people. my son lives they too. would like to fvisit in Montreol

In Rachel's early entry she had limited knowledge of English vocabulary. She was able to tell me about her weekend but again she required assistance in writing it down. In her later entry her range of vocabulary had increased and she was able to use basic nouns and some simple adjectives to describe the city she would like to visit.

Mechanics

Early entry (Nov. 20/97)	Later entry (April 6/98)
Theyer'e 14 in studen aur English closs- Theye nine women and tiv men. Six students rom Vitnam Thrce studants are from Chia. two studants are from Iraq one student from Lebanon one student ifom Etrioyia un t couy 13	What will you do after school? cooking shopping returning drinking buying eating

Rachel's early entry showed volume compared to the latter. However, even though she copied the story from the board the writing contained numerous errors in spelling. The later entry was shorter in length but indicated Rachel's marked attempts to use standard spelling.

Mohamed

Throughout the entire period of the study Mohamed resisted attempting to write down his own thoughts or ideas as free writing. Mohamed, as an inexperienced writer, was more comfortable writing simple sentences in answer to specific questions that were asked. The number of journal entries Mohamed produced on his own was minimal compared to some other students, but he did progress from numbered one-sentence statements to writing in narrative form.

Amount of Writing

Early entry (Nov. 27/97)	Later entry (Jan. 27/98)
- 23 words	- 33 words
1. I am from Iraq 2. I was job welder. I like this job because I good in welder 3. I like job in Canada welder	We have different calendar moon calendar. Avter Ramadan 3 days holiday. this holiday we visit and tok and make ceke and juice in Ramadan one month can't eat just in night can eat

The above examples showed Mohamed's progress in the volume of writing he produced. In his first journal entry he wrote 23 words in simple sentences, whereas in his last entry he wrote more complex sentences although the amount of writing did not increase

greatly.

Content

Early entry (Dec. 1/97)	Later entry (Jan. 27/98)
in morning I was go to Edmonton cnter drink	Ramadam we hav a different calendar moon calendar. Avter Ramadam 3 days holiday. this holiday we visit and tok and make ceke one month can't eat just in night can eat

Mohamed wrote on topics ranging from his personal experiences to a description of the celebration of Ramadan. At the beginning stage of Mohamed's experience in journal writing he produced simple sentences. He wrote more toward the end of the session and showed progression from one-sentence entries to two or three connected ideas linked together to form a narrative.

Organization

Early entry (Dec. 5/97)	Later entry (Jan. 14/98)
I like to writ in my journal because it help me spelling difficult. it will helps spelling.	I listen in Canada Freedom. I like Canada because freedom. I lik iny thing in Canada.

In both Mohamed's early and later journal entries he presented his thoughts in a sequential order and made an attempt to link ideas from one sentence to the next. These entries illustrated his first use of connectives such as "because".

Sentence Structure

Early entry (Dec. 5/997)	Later entry (Dec. 16/97)
I like tree becouise beautiful I have tree	go shopping west edmonton and visit my frinds and play pool and cooking walking

The above entry was an example of Mohamed's early attempt to describe a Christmas tree by using two simple sentences. His later entry illustrated his continued use of connectives such as "and" to link thoughts.

Vocabulary

Early entry (Nov. 2/97)	Later entry (Dec. 15/97)
I was go to Edmonton cnter drink	on Friday? I go to shopping buy fuood on Saturday I? visit my friend on Sunday I? I'm cooking and play pool

In both journal entries Mohamed described events he took part in on the weekend. His later entry showed more detail by using words in different word forms, such as "visit" and "play" as verbs.

Mechanics

Early entry (Dec. 5/97)	Later entry (Jan. 14/98)
I listen in Canada Freedom. I like Canada because freedom. I lik iny thing in Canada.	I like to writ in my journal because it help me spelling difficult. it will helps spelling.

On first reading of the early entry and the later, it would appear that Mohamed had not moved a great deal toward using standard spelling consistently. However, the later entry showed a marked development in his willingness to try a more complex sentence pattern. It was interesting to note that he was more successful in choice of words and grammar construction in the longer sentence. In both entries he was using punctuation.

Abano

Abano came to Canada from a background filled with political unrest and persecution. It was not until the end of the session that Abano felt safe enough to write more openly about his background experiences and about the members of his family.

Amount of Writing

Early entry (Feb. 4/98)	Later entry (April 15/98)
My name is Abano Thanh. I am from from Burma. I like Canada. I am a politician. I am married. My wife name is Ohn Mya. I have one sister. Her name is Thin Thin. She is also a house wife. I cam to Canada 10 December 19997. I have no children. I like T.V.	My name is Abano Thanh. I am married, my wife name is Chin Mya. I am from Burma. I came to Canada on December 10, 1997. I have 3 children, the children live in Burma. I live in an apartment Edmonton city. I am a revalty government. I live in Thai Land 5 years. I am a convict Thai government. May 27, 1976. I am a prisioner 9 month Thailand. I am against government Burma. I denounce in front of embassy Burma at Thai Land. I learning English at the Annex now. I going to Calgary this month 24 day.

Abano wrote 54 words in his first journal entry and then increased the number of words to 132 in his later entry.

Content

Early entry (Feb. 11/98)	Later entry (March 10/98)
Winter is my favorite season. I like winter because winter is very nice. It is little cold and usually snowing. I can do many for my studies in the winter. Besides I can watch TV to Improve my spoken English. I can also go for shopping and market. Not only that I can see the snow growing up too. I love the country Canada.	I am from Burma. In Burma a husband can have many wives. I think a husband should have 1 wife. My father has 1 wife. My mother has 1 husbands. I have no children. In Burma this is normal.

Abano chose to write about Canada's winter temperatures in his first journal writing. He identified some of the ways he could pass the time during the cold season. In his later entry he described an important feature of his Burmese culture that related to the marriage laws and customs concerning polygamy. While he was talking about two different topics his line of thought contrasted two outstanding features of each country.

Organization

Early entry (Feb. 9/98)	Later entry (March 9/98)
On Saturday I go to Supermarket 11:00 On Sunday I live in the Room, read and wath T.V. too. Firday nigth I go wach movie English.	Thursday. I go to shopping in the market. Friday. I go to Calgary on Friday in the morning. I went to farm on Saturday. Sunday. I come back from Calgary on Sunday in the evening.

In both journal entries Abano described, in list form, events from his weekend in coherent sequential order. In the first entry the order was recognizable, but he listed the events according to the days of the week, which were out of order. In the later entry he was able to order the days correctly.

Sentence Structure

Early entry (Feb. 19/98)	Later entry (March 28/98)
My name is Abano Thanh. I am from Burma. No I was job Canada. I Finish School would like Job Mechanic.	I did come December 10, 1997 to Canada. My birthday is July 24. I am from Burma. I like the conditions and the freedom in Canada. Winter in Canada is very cold.

In Abano's early entry he began with two short simple sentences which are grammatically correct. These particular sentences were ones he had practiced many times. He continued the entry, however, with sentence three and four where he attempted to write new information. In this case the syntax was not yet developed. Although the structure in the first sentence of the later entry was slightly awkward, the rest of the writing was grammatically correct.

Vocabulary

Early entry (March 11/98)	Later entry (March 24/98)
I live in an apartment. I have 3 rooms. They are a bedroom, a kitchen and bathroom.	I think it is beter to drive a car. I hope someday I can buy a car. I take, drive a car, I go to school, I drive a car.I go to market I drive a car. In my native country Burma people usually drive the car, ride morocycle and walk, some people take the bus, subway and train, some people drive the taxi.

As well as the increase in length and better organization of ideas in the later journal entry, Abano illustrated his growth in vocabulary development from the first entry to the latter. Basic vocabulary was used in the early writing whereas the later one presented a variety of different modes of transportation. Abano repeated the adjective "some" and used the adverb "usually" which illustrated the beginning of more tentative language.

Mechanics

Early entry (Feb. 13/98)	Later entry (March 17/98)
Friday February 13. 98, 1:45 I come back from school in the Room watched T.V. Too. Saturday February 14. 98 I can also for shopping and market.	January 4, 1948 the independence is country Burma. July 19, 1947 general Aung Sun the die day. Burma. March 27 country Burma for revolution day. August 8, 1988 democracy four die people 5000 in Burma. I escape in Burma 1988.
On Sunday February 15. 98 I go to Calgary, on Monday, February 16. 98 I come back from Calgary.	My birthday is July 24, 1956 My birthday to celebrate July 23

Abano's use of punctuation to this point remained fairly stable. He used periods correctly at the end of each sentence in both entries and inseted commas appropriately. The correct use of capitalization was more evident in the latter entry where he capitalized the names of cities and countries, while in the earlier entry he overused capitals for the words "room" and "too".

Hue

When Hue came into the class he had already been in Canada for four years and had worked as a machinist. His oral language was well developed and he had a good sense of humor which endeared him to the other students. Although there was improvement in some areas of written language, the amount Hue produced at the beginning had not increased significantly at the end of the session.

Amount of Writing

Early entry (April 22/98)

My name is Hue Kim. I am from Vietnam. I am married. My wife's name is NHAN. I have two brothers. My eldest brother live in Autralia. He is a baker. My elder brother live in canada. He is a a washer man. I like to do many things. I like to play soccer and watch Hong Kond film To night I saw a video. The name is who am I played by Jacky Chan.

Later entry (June 19/98)

My name is Hue Kim I live in Edmonton. I am from Vietnam. I am married, I came to Canada in June 1994, My wife came to Canada in October 1996, we has no children, we live in an apartment, I am a student, I goes to school Five days a week, I learning English Annex in Linc 1. I drove the car to school, my wife wroks in a westend linen., We are like living in Canada?

Hue wrote 74 words for his first entry and 78 words in the later entry.

Content

Early entry (May 1/998)

I like my country vietnam to go to for a holiday. I was born in Vietname I know Vietnamese and I have many friends and relatives special July. There are a lot of fruit I can go to seashore swining and eating seafood and good

Later entry (June 8/98)

I thinks a boy and an girl live in family is good. because mother and father they res olds. I thinks I live in family is good, because mouther and father is old. I held theyre cooked and cleaned sometimes theyre sik I drove theyre get hospital.

Both entries focused on the topic of family. In the earlier entry Hue mentioned his family but concentrated on the features of the country as a tourist attraction. In the later entry Hue wrote about the virtues of family life, especially the strong values that are central in Viet Nam.

Organization

Early entry (May 8/998)

I came to Canada on June-16-1994. befor in Vietnam many frinds visit vietnam takle canada is good country and very cold.
I like canada weather summer and work the job good many
I don't like canada icome tax, very higt.

Later entry (June 3/98)

I like Spelling, Talking, Journal and computers.
I like writing write letters easy but thinking diffucult.
Sometimes talking, sometimes listening also difficult.

In both journal entries Hue is expressed his likes and dislikes of parts of his life in Canada. In the early entry he focused on the weather and the high cost of income tax. In

the latter he talked about his language class and reflected on areas he found easy and most difficult. Hue organized his thoughts by contrasting his ideas and he moved back and forth in making comparisons.

Sentence Structure

Early entry (May 20/98)
In Vietnam peoples go shopping and go supermarket everyday because everything buy food and clothes very cheap.
on t shirt canada cost $10.00
12 t shirt in Vietname cost $10.00
but jeans expensive $50.00
people work one month 40.00
Like tailor very little money.
This woman work, men job like mechanic or machinist more money.

Later entry (June 18/98)
I like Jazz music, and little Ragaee. this music because I feel mellow and dance. I don't like classical or chants because I feel nothing.

Although the early entry indicated more volume in the journal text than was shown in the latter, Hue's sentence structure was more developed in the latter entry. For example, Hue's sentences in the earlier piece reflected his lack of knowledge of appropriate use of parts of speech and grammar rules in written work. In the later entry Hue produced mostly correct syntax and used a compound sentence.

Vocabulary

Early entry (May 19/98)
On Saturday Morning 10:00 AM, I drove my wrtie to go to work, in Afternoon at 2:00 PM I pick up my wrtie went home Afer shower my wrtie and I eating lunch in evening my wrtie cooked dinner and wacth movie. On Sunday Morning my wrtie and I went to eat din sum, in evening we went to restaurant, eat dinner and listen music. on Monday Morning we went to supermarket bought food at 1:30 pm we went to cinema watch movie the name of the movie Deep impact I do homework and clean up and watch news on TV.

Later entry (June 22/98)
On Saturday morning, I drove my wife goes eating din sum and shopping at night my wife cooked dinner eating at home and watch movie on Sunday we went to supermarket bought food and clean up at 1 o'clock I talking my brother in Autralia one hour, at two o'clock sleeps.

Hue used descriptive and specific word choices as he recalled events that took place over a period of a long weekend and Father's Day. For example: "after shower", "eat dim

sum", "supermarket", "do homework", "watch news".

Mechanics

Early entry (May 27/98)	Later entry (June 15/98)
In Canada we are cleaning and cooking and shopping. In Vietname women cleaning and cooking and shopping men a men going to working. Men should sometime and cooking and shopping and cleaning We are going Kingsway Mall Shopping.	I am married October 17 1996. in my countres a women got married 24 and 26 and gots married 28 and 30. My countres somtime a men has two wifes. I likes to want two children, 1 son and 1 daughter.

In both journal entries Hue was thinking and writing about gender roles in the family and the workplace in both Canada and Viet Nam. As he contrasted the household responsibilities of women in Canada with those in his native country, he described the traditionally accepted standards for each country. Even in the earlier entry, spelling and capitalization were generally accurate but there were errors in grammar. In Hue's latter sample of writing, the spelling appeared at a similar stage of development and this writing also showed errors in grammar. Hue had a tendency to overgeneralize the rules for plural forms such as "gots", "countres", and "wifes".

Yin

Yin had a great way of making the other students laugh. Her sense of humor and her attempt at telling jokes often provided a welcome break for us all during the English class. She came to Canada from China with her husband who was a welder. Yin had a number of different interests and participated in several recreational activities outside of class. She especially liked to dance. These outside interests provided her with things to write about and talk about during our discussion times.

Amount of Writing

Early entry (April 22, 1998)

Wednesday April 22 1998
My name is Yin Wong. I am
from CHINA. I like Canada. I am

a student. I am married. My husband's
name is WINSTON DIEP. I have one
sister. Her name is MUZHEN WONG
She is a workman. I have one brother.
his name is ZAN WONG.
he is a doctor. I
I like to do many things. I like to dance
and watch movies. Last night I go to dance.
It was very good.

Later entry (June 19, 1998)

Friday June 19 1998
My name is Yin Wong. I come from CHINA. I live
in Edmonton now. I am married. My husband's
name is WINSTON.
My husband works is welder. I go to school five
days a week. I learning English at Annex. I walks to
school. I get up at 8 o'clock on weekdays.
On Saturday and Sunday
we usually get up around 11 o'clock.
have baby now. We are happy. We like living in
Canada.

Yin showed progress in several areas of her writing. However, overall the amount of text she produced did not increase dramatically over the period of the session. For example, her early entry showed 74 words and the later 75 words.

Content

Early entry (April 27/98)

Friday May 8 1998
I came to canada on March 20. 1998.

I hear about canada the weather is
very cold and people is very good.
I like about canada. have very fruts
and people is very good.
I don't like about canada
the weather is very cold.

Later entry (June 16/98)

June 16 1998 Tuesday
I am happy when I go shopping and talk to my
mother in CHINA.
I am happy with my husdand in Canada. My husdand
has good jod.
He is welder. My husdand and I like
to do meny thing go to restaurant eat lunch then
we are go no night club.

Yin presented her information in straightforward chronological order in the early entry. She listed what she liked about Canada and what she didn't like. The later entry, although not any longer in the amount of writing, suggested a positive flow of ideas which were clearly stated.

Sentence Structure

Early entry (May 17/98)

Sunday May 17 1998
I have a good weeking. On Friday after school I go home. Then I go with my husband to shopping. We

were buy some rouge. At night we were dance. On Saturday, we sleep until 12:00. Then we go flower house buy flower go home plant. On Sunday I and my husband were her's friend home watch some china movies. On Monday I were to library ouside look show. It was very nice.

Later entry (June 18/98)

June 18 1998 Thursday
I like CHINESE music. This music makes me feel happy.I want to dance. I don't like classical.
I feel no thing.

The sentences Yin created in her early entry indicated an ability to balance longer and shorter statements to create flow in the writing. Even in the early entry she experimented with the use of past and present tense, but had difficulty with correct construction of sentences. Although the later piece was overall a very brief journal entry, it was interesting to note how the few short sentences followed one another in such a way that the effect created was a poetic lyric-style expression.

Vocabulary

Early entry (April 28/989)

Tuesday April 28 1998
CHINA
There are 4 season in CHINA.
There is spring, summer Fall and winter. I like winter season. I like winter because. The weather is cloudy and snowy. About all the snowy.

Later entry (June 8/98)

Monday June 8
I think they are live along is good. Because you have more freedom. I can do what I like I can come home anytime I like.

Yin used descriptive language in her early entry to describe winter in Canada. She chose words such as "snowy" and "cloudy". She named and listed the seasons in order. The choice of the word "think" in the later entry suggested an awareness that she was expressing her opinion rather than facts in this reflection. Yin chose the effective word "freedom" to sum up her reasons for wanting to live alone when she said, "because you have more freedom. I can do what I like I can come home anytime I like."

Mechanics

Early entry (May 20/98)	Later entry (June 15/98)
May 20, 1998 In China everything more expensive, people go shopping everyday. I like canada shopping because everything big but everything beautiful.	In my country a woman is 20 year old when she gets married. In my country a man is 22 year old when she gets married. My country a man only wife. This is the same in Canada. Yes, I want two children. One son and one daughter.

In both journal entries Yin generally used punctuation, periods, commas and capital letters correctly throughout. Spelling was consistently standard in both entries and the only difficulty appeared to be in sentence construction where Yin omited words in sentences. Yin was at the beginning stage in knowing the correct use of pronouns such as "he/she" and in using singular and plural forms. Overall, Yin was following the developmental process I encouraged, which was fluency before control.

Ali

Ali and her husband came to Canada from Viet Nam. Her husband had been a former student in the school and encouraged Ali to study English. Her oral language was understandable but she had not experienced any instruction in writing. Ali was very pleased that her husband was more advanced in his English language skills and often talked about working with him in a pizza restaurant on the weekends. She credited him with her learning English at home.

Amount of Writing

Early entry (Nov. 18/97)

Nov 18
My name is Ali Chiem. I am from Viet Name. I like Viet Nam, I like canada too. I am a student. I like study English. I am married. My husband is name is Huy we have no children. I have a sister. Her name is Le. She is also a student. She is studying English in Annex scholl. I like to do many things. I sometim go to shopping and watch everything. Last week I saw a video. The name of the movie was the _____. It was very good.

Later entry (Jan. 20/98)

I WILL WRITE ABOUT LIFE and MY FAMILY.

My family living in VIETNAM. I was born in small city. My parents too living in VIETNAM. I have four sisters and five brothers. Everybody too go to work. They very happy and have good time. I sometime write letter and phone and ask visit about family. In Canada I living with my husband and his parents in a house. I don't have friends over here. When I come to school I start have some friends but my teacher teach for me name is Joanie. I very thanks her did try teach for me. Thanks My teacher.

Ali wrote 89 words in her earlier entry and she progressed to more volume in her later entry which was 108 words.

Content

Early entry (Nov. 24/97)

November 24, 1997

My weekend
On Friday, my husband and I went shopping. I bought blouse. On Saturday I get stay home and stay my home. we watch tv. Then my husband and I went to a Mekong restaurant on Sunday. I cleaned my house. My Husband and I went to work for his brother.

Later entry (Dec. 15/97)

December 15, 1997

This weekend I was sad too. Because I don't went. I stay home work everything. I wash my clothes and write letter for my parents in Viet Nam. I met my husband go in the West Edmonton mall bit I don't bought everything only many take photographs memory for Chirstmas.

In both entries Ali wrote about her weekend. In the earlier one she described events at home, working and eating out. The overall tone was different in the later entry, perhaps because it was getting closer to Christmas time and she missed her family. However, she recalled shopping and writing letters to her parents in Viet Nam.

Organization

Early entry (Dec. 5/97)

Dec 5, 97
I like a real Christmas tree because it is very nice. I don't know in my home have an artificial but I think maybe have. Because last christmas I am in Viet Nam. I don't wellcome Christmas in Canada. Because I came to canada Sepember 24, 1997.

Later entry (Jan. 4/98)

I write about my life in two weeks ago. When I end school in the Friday, I came back home and after I went work with my husband six days in a week. when to date Chirstmas we were company closed. My husband get off holiday. We went to some store, bought presents for my nieces and nephews. In nightday that my house had opened party a lot people to my house very pleasance to 5.00 am and everybody returned their home. In boxing day I with my husband went shopping bought something on sale it was very cheap. After we were works everyday but only Sunday my husband doesn't go to works.

In the early entry, although the organization came across as somewhat choppy, the ideas Ali attempted to express stood out. The order of events was sequential, and she used present tense. She concluded with a logical statement that she came to Canada in September of 1998 so she didn't know then whether she would have an artificial or a real Christmas tree. The later entry was organized somewhat differently. Ali tried to write in past tense and her ideas were expressed more fluently with smoother transition between sentences.

Sentence Structure

Early entry (Nov. 20/97)

November 20
English Our English class.

There are 14 students in our class. There are nine women and five men. Six students are from Viet Nam. Three

students are from China. Two students are from Iraq. One student is from Poand.
School

When I was arrive Canada I come to Annex chool and I am a student new. I am very study English. Because it is language help for me understand.

Later entry (Dec. 9/97)

December, 9, 1997
Canada is the country very love. Before I came to Canada my husband tell canada very
cold and have snowy in the Winter.
In summer are peoples on holiday. They will come to picnic and very many play game. After I came to canada I think saein my
husband tell canada so cold but it's many lanscape very nice. Country canada very large and stand second on the world. I don't like to winter in Canada because very cold. Country Viet Name the weather is hot. When I came ot canada is in winter.
The weather is don't suitable with me.
But I very like life in Canada have many playgame and food incompertable.

Ali's earlier entry illustrated her use of short simple sentences, most of which showed a similar syntactical pattern. In the later entry Ali demonstrated her ability to use a balance of short and longer statements with a variety of different ways of beginning a sentence. She continued to demonstrate an effective transition between sentences.

Vocabulary

Early entry (Dec. 18/97)	Later entry (Jan. 27/98)
Thursday, December 18, 1997 I very like christmas in may native country because I go to the church after I go visit my friends, we will party and eat dinner with everybody at her house. We open presents and take photograps annivesary. Christmas very happy and interesting.	January 27, 1998 Vietnamese New Year is on January 29 this year. before the new year people will clean thier home. On new year' day people wear new clothes and shoes and we get more one age. Children get money in little red envelopes "lucky money" and children twll "chuk Nung Nam Mei". Year of the tiger and new year left is "Tu Nguyen Tong".

While Ali's earlier entry showed adequate descriptive word choices such as "happy" and "interesting" she extended her knowledge of vocabulary in the later journal entry. Here, she created more vivid images with her use of phrases and adjectives such as "little red envelopes" and "lucky money". Ali used Vietnamese language to describe the celebration of new year which gives the description more authenticity.

Mechanics

Early entry (Dec. 2/97)	Later entry (Jan. 27/98)
Dec. 2, 1997 I am from Viet Nam. I was a tailor in my native country but now I am living in Canada. I am a student Annex chool. Before I try study English yer good. After when I finish school I can luck yor works but I very a tailor worker in company.	January 27, 1998 I very like to write in my journal. Maybe it help for me understand very much English and remember many vocabulary when I homework and write journal. It help me spelling difficult. It will help spelling and vocabulary. I feel happy and relax.

Ali showed growth in her spelling and vocabulary throughout the session. Her spelling of "remember", "homework", "difficult" and "relaxed" was correct. She was farther ahead in spelling than in the construction of sentences. Ali used correct punctuation and credited her journal writing for this achievement.

Lai Sheng

Lai Sheng came to Canada from China where she had been employed as a reporter. She was a college student and had previous experience teaching Chinese in her native country. She explained that one of the reasons she came to Canada was to enroll her son in school and to ensure his future opportunities in the workplace.

Amount of Writing

Early entry (Feb. 4/98)

Journal Entry Feb 4, 98
My name is Lai Sheng Xi. I am from China. I like Canada. I am a student. I am married, My husband's name is Pui. I have three sister. One sister name is Lifeng. one sister name is Lien. one sister name is Li Sheng. They live in China. I have three borther. one borther name is Yang hong. one borther name is Yang sheng. one borther name is Yang shi. They also live in China. I have one son. His name is Moyang. he is 15 yasr old. he everyday in school.
I like to do many things. I like wath video, read book and read news paper.

Later entry (April 14/98)

My Story - April 15, 1998
My name is Lai Sheng Xi. My family imnugrated came to Canada in last years April 8. My husband name is Pui Liu. We live in Edmonton of an apartment. We have a son, His name is Moyang Liu. He is student grade 8. He goes to school five days a week. Beforer came to Canada my husband's business not finish in China, so he must often return China.
I am studying English at the Annex. I walk to school. I like learing English at school. Then I stay home I feel lonliness, because I don't have friends in Canada, not people talling for me.
My husband and my son like Canada. My son very happy every day. I think someday I also like Canada.

In Lai Sheng's early entry she wrote 109 words and then increased in length in her later entry to writing 127 words.

Content

Early entry (Feb. 25/98)

Native Country
My mother Land is China. It has 9.6 million square kilo metre of area. 56 nationality and 1.2 billion of poeple. It has 5 thousand years of history. I was born and grow in northern China. the weather there is same as Edmonton the winer is very cold.
people in China form graed one to graed nine don't have to pay money to go to school. because China has many people. Minority of poeple can to university. I want my son going to university and to be well educated. So I quit the job what I like. my Family imnugrated to Canada last year.

Later entry (March 17/98)

Holidays & Festivals
March 17 98
In China August. 15. is mid-fill day. Every years Aug. 15 day. night moon very round. people go to outsied near the house eat mooncake Look at moon. Mooncake is delicious have some unt in mooncake. Mid-fill holiday has 5 hundred years of history.

Lai Sheng often dwelt on the topic of her native country of China when she was writing in her journal. In her later entry she described the food associated with the ancient celebration of Mid-fill Day held in August. In her early entry she wrote about China, again stressing the long history of that nation. She also contrasted the opportunities for young people to attend university with opportunities in Canada.

Organization

Early entry (Feb. 13/98)

Friday Feb 13. 98. 1:45 I came back home. watched winter sport. TV.
Saturday got up at 10:00. I and my son went to Edmonton city Library reade book.
Sunday I and husband went to West Edmonton Mall 2:00 cme home. We maked dumpling. for supper
Monday. My husbnd. my son. and I watched computer VCD. This movies name is BEN. HUR. This is my Long weekend.

Later entry (March 11/98)

Housing
March 11, 98
I live in an apartment. I have 5 rooms in my apartment. I have a bedroom, a kitchenroom, a bathroom, a livingroom, a storeroom in my apartment.
My address is #19_. 10620.-107 St. Edmonton. AB. Canada. T5H 2Y7

In her early entry, Lai Sheng used the days of the week and times of the day to organize her straightforward presentation of weekend events. In the later one she gave her address

and described her apartment. She began with stating the number of rooms and then listed each room by name.

Sentence Structure

Early entry (Feb. 9/98)	Later entry (April 2/98)
weekend Feb 9, 98 On Friday after school. I back home. eat supper at night watchet TV. On Saturday I got up at 9:00. I eating eggs, bananas. cleaned my something On Sunday, I got up at 10:00. I and housband, went to supersotre shopping, went home cooked. ate. and at night. readed letter to firend in china.	Turesday Apirl 2, 1998 On Turesday I get up at 9:00. after breakfast, I help my hesband typeing Chinese on my computer. for three hous. After Lunch, I sleeped for tow hous. beForer dinner, I writed my journal. At night I watched TV for Long time. I go to bed at 10:30 pm.

In this particular early journal entry Lai Sheng attempted to get down her ideas but struggled with writing complete sentences. She attempted short choppy statements that she ended with a period but she did not produce a full sentence. In the later entry Lai Sheng progressed to writing about the day's events in sentence form and for the most part used punctuation correctly.

Vocabulary

Early entry (Feb. 11/98)	Later entry (March 24/98)
seasons Feb 11 98 Fall is my favorite season. I like fall. because fall is a very beauifu season. There are a blue sky. a grasy lawn, and red fruits. and yellow maple leaf in fall. Fall is coloured.'s season. Fall looks like a very pretty picture The weather in fall is very nice. It is not hot like summer, and it is not cold like winter. It. is a litter warm. I can walk in outisde everyday and ride bicycle. I think fall is a very good time in China, in Canada. I love fall!	**Transportation** March 24 98 I think it is better to drive a car because it is more convnient to drive a car than to take the bus. go shopping. In my native country China some people usually ride a bicycles, some people take the bus, some people ride a motacycles, some people walks and few peopls drive a cars to work. Car is xpensive in China.

In both entries Lai Sheng expressed her opinion, first about her favorite season and then about the best kind of transportation. She listed the features of a Canadian autumn using carefully chosen words that created imagery of color as she described the blue sky, a

grassy lawn, red fruits, yellow maple leaf. Even in this early stage of writing, Lai Sheng introduced the use of metaphors such as "Fall looks like a very pretty picture." and "cold like winter", "hot like summer". Her later entry showed development in vocabulary when she used more sophisticated language such as the words "convenient", "usually", and "expensive".

Mechanics

Early entry (Feb. 19/98)	Later entry (April 14/98)
Feb 19 98 My name is Lai Sheng Xi I from is china. I was a reporter I want to learn English. I came to Canada is August. 8. 1997. I like Education in Canada.	April 14 1998 I was born and grow in China. I speak Chinese 40 years. beforer came to Canada. I never don't study English, but I think. if I will be go to school. Learning English. I will speak English for shortime. English easy. Then I after came to Canada. and went to school learning English. I feel English is difficult for me. English and Chinese is diffrent Language. I need study English Long time. I think that was wrong. I want hard Learing English.

In both journal entries the spelling was generally correct and any misspellings were decipherable. Lai Sheng used periods and commas appropriately throughout. In the early entry she used short sentences but her use of capital letters were accurate. In the later entry Lai Sheng demonstrated her understanding of contractions such as "don't" and connectives such as "and". In this same entry Lai Sheng linked ideas from one sentence to the next.

Kam

Kam was one of the most sociable and enthusiastic students in the class. He came from a large family in Viet Nam and he was happy and lively but also very serious about learning to be a Canadian and becoming literate in English. Right from the start Kam wrote with a strong voice and a sense of audience.

Amount of Writing

Early entry (Dec. 18/97)

Annex, Tuesday, November 18th, 1997
Dear Joanie?
My name is Kam, I am a new student of Annex, you are my teacher, I like you because you are teaching us very hard. She is a good teacher.
I just came to Canada. I like your Country, this is a good Country, because it's very large and nice but is very cold in winter, In Vietnam it is very hot, that is a honey my native Country, too. When I come to Canada I like to do many thing, the first time, I will go to school. I study English very much. It will talk English very good, I think. I will try, after time, I will go to work if I found it.
Dear Joanie, I have six brothers and three siters my family is very poor. So, I try do many things that is very good for my life.

Later entry (Jan. 20/98)

January 20, 1998
My hobby is collect stamps.
I were collecting stamps when I were twelve year old. At first, I economized some stamps when I like. This stamps, my brothers and my sisters gave me, my friends gave me too. Sometimes, if I ahve money, I bought some beautiful stamps or a new set of stamp. I alway bought new stamps because they were cheaper old stamps. I had some old stamps but I like them very much.
I only collect stamps for my life more happy. I don't rich for buy or sale stamps.

Kam came into class with a stronger oral basis in English than many of the other students. His early entry consisted of 146 words, while two months later his entry actually consisted of fewer words (93 words). These particular samples of the amount of writing illustrated my observations that with some of the students, the increase in length with each entry was not always evident or may not have been necessarily relevant. 'What' the students said and 'how' they phrased it may have been more important. In this case, as with some of the other students who were at a more advanced level in language development coming into the program, Kam concentrated on aspects of writing other than length. Also, as it was recently pointed out to me, when trying new things, writers tend to write less. He was moving from factual information to a description of his favorite hobby.

Content

Early entry (Nov. 20/97)	Later entry (Dec. 19/97)
My Native Country My native country name is VIETNAM. A country is smaller than other countries in the world. VietNam is a tropical country. There are four seasons in north VietNam and two seasons in south Vietnam. The weather in north VietNam is cold. The temperature is +10 degree. The high will be 0 degree In south VietNam, there are rainy season and suny season. The weather is hot. The populations of VietNam over 70 millions. VietNam is poor but developing It is expand agriculture and develop heavy industry. There are many scenery beautiful. The people of VietNam are Well come you to VIETNAM. BY Kam Lang	Dec 19, 1997 In Vietnam, There are many celebrate's days importans and full of animation. But I like clebrate's days: * November 20: The pupils presented new year's day gifts to their teacher. At the time, teachers and pupils are very happy. They organize a merry music. They making plans for their class. They go to picnic. The pupils come back old school. They visited their old teachers. The animated atmosphere of celebrate are happy and moved. The teachers are moved by the solicitude of pupils. * August 15: (lunar calendar). The mid-autumn festival, At the time. The harvest moon is round and bright. The children are happiest, because they will get presents. Almost they like glass huricane lamp-shade than "moon-cakes" * New Year oin VietNam tried the mooncake. It is delicious. The most important festival of the year is TET. Tet rings in the new year. Everybody are happiest. They wishing each other happiness, luck and prosperity. They worship the ancestors. They have some favourite foods. The children have money by old persons. They go to pagoda and they go out. They come to their relation and their friendly.

In both entries Kam was writing about his native country Viet Nam. He wrote in detail and developed each idea fully. He brought in a lot of information about his country and his voice was enthusiastic and proud. Kam's choice of language provided a clear picture of the celebrations, the weather, the economy and the attractions for tourists.

Organization

Early entry (Dec. 5/97)

December 05, 1997
Happy new year! Merry Christmas! that is a good in a year! I like much Christmas too! Christmas will brings everybody happy than everyday, the children will be most happy. Christmas has many trees, a real Christmas tree and an artificial Christmas tree. They both are beautiful. I think I like a real Christmas tree can put outside the house and an artificial can put in our home. Like this, they are very beautiful on everywhere. The Christmas will come with us, every house have a Christmas tree. So, my house has two Christmas trees, too. Like that, they will be beautiful for us. Happy new year! Merry Christmas.

Later entry (Jan. 27/98)

Tuesday, January 27, 1998
Now, In Vietnam, Everybody is waiting on animal will born. We knew, that is a tiger.
Who will born on this year, that is age of tiger because 1998 is the year of the tiger.
I remember new year in Vietname very much. I will wear new clothes and shoes on Friday and go out with our class. We will go to West Edmonton Mall we have lunch ...
Thank you Mrs Joanie Parker
Happy new year

In both journal entries Kam was thinking and writing about the Christmas and New Year seasons. In the early entry he talked about getting a Christmas tree and began his writing with a greeting to the reader. He organized his argument by contrasting real and artificial trees and pointed out the advantage of both kinds. His later entry revealed a shift in tone to one more of a story teller as he first provided information and then shifted into a reflective mode as he remembered New Year in Vietnam.

Sentence Structure

Early entry (Dec. 2/97)

December 2, 97
I'm from Vietnam.
I was a cashier in a restaurant in Vietnam. I like this job because it was very light. But I didn't like do this long time because my salary was very slow. It won't help my in my life. I new come to Canada about two months. I don't speak English. I will study English good, maybe I will study higher level, I think. maybe I will study about mineral oil or petroleum or petrol. that is my hope.

Later entry (Dec. 16/97)

December 16, 1997
The Christmas will come with us. We are happy. I am too but I remember Christmas in Vietnam so much. In year, the first time I enjoy Christmas in Canada I think, I will have many surprise. but never mind, because I have a big of my family in Canada. I get together with my brother and my sister, we have a potluck dinner. I go for a walk. I talk to someone about how you feel ...
I will send Christmas Cards to my friends in Vietnam and I will write letters to my brothers and sister in V.N.
I write in English for them
I feel happy at Christmas
I am not alone
I feel lonely on holidays

In both the above journal entries Kam recalled with nostalgia his life in Viet Nam. He expressed his reasons for coming to Canada and his memories of Christmas by using mainly complete sentences throughout. His writing was also balanced with long and short sentences which created a fairly smooth flow. He used descriptive clauses such as "... but I remember Christmas in Viet Nam so much" and "... because I have a big family in Canada". Kam demonstrated his competence in the correct use of contractions.

Vocabulary

Early entry (Nov. 24/97)

Monday, November 24th, 1997
My Weekend.
On the weekend I had a very nice weekend. On night Friday I stayed home. I watch Vietnam's music and film. on Saturday I went to Calgary with mother and brother. We visited my brother. on night Saturday, we had Vietnam's food. It's very good. o Sunday we came back to Edmonton. on night Sunday I went to shopping. I just look around but my sister buy anything.

Later entry (Dec. 19/97)

*Friday, December 19, 1997
I still went to work after finished at work I went home by bus. There were two person with urbane maness. I felt great admiration for two men. A boy to gave up his seat to elderly man. A man blews a trumpet for everybody for everybody on the bus to enjoy. when I listened and I felt don't tired. Thanks very much for that two man.

In Kam's first entry above he presented a chronological list of events on the weekend. His word choice was adequate. He used specific words to describe the food he ate and

what he watched on television. However, in the second entry he brought in new and more sophisticated vocabulary such as "urbane maness (manners)" to describe the actions of two men on the bus. He used specific words in phrases such as "blews a trumpet" and "great admiration".

Mechanics

Early entry (Dec. 9/97)

Tuesday, December 9, 1997
Canada, a country is very large and very nice. this country, I very like. When I don't come to Canada yet. Of course, my brother and my sister living here, but I like best in Canada hasn't war. After that it doesn't has bush and a country is cleanly, and a country has fresh air. Canada is a country has industry in the first world. The lanscapes Canada are very beautiful. The feef's Canada is very dilicious. but I very like hamburger. What a dilicious hamburger. I like autumn too, many tress have gold leafs, that is beautiful and lovely, after the end. I like people in Canada. every people are friendly. The first people is my teacher. She is teaching me and us. Sorry, I don't like cold in winter. But Canada is lovely.

Later entry (Dec. 18/97)

Thursday, December 18, 1997
In my native country. TET (new year) is a big celebrate. and Chrstimas is a big celebrate, too. I am buddhism. I don't enjoy Christmas. So I like Christmas too. because I had many friends were catholic. Christmas is a big their celebrate. we go to church. in church had activity very happy. they go to camp, they dance and sing, opera, sport.
but I like best sport, because I helped them very much. because I am the Coach football for children under 16 at my village. I can horn blowing for soccer or volleyball.
That is happiest my memory.
It was memories still green.

In the early entry Kam made an enormous attempt to use punctuation such as periods and commas. However, he had difficulty using them appropriately in most cases. He showed his consistent use of capitalizing the word "Canada". His spelling of frequently used words was generally correct and he experimented and drew on his phonetic knowledge with words such as "dilicious" and "leafs". He showed an understanding of contractions such as "don't" and "doesn't" and generally used them in grammatically correct form. His later entry demonstrated his knowledge of two religions in his native country and the meaning of the words "catholic" and "buddhism" (both spelled correctly).

Discussion

When I examined all the products the students had created as written journal entries, I was struck by the growth in their written language development evident over a relatively short period of time. I realized that these students who were attempting to express their feelings, opinions and understandings even while exploring new dimensions of writing didn't abandon their focus on meaning; when the going got difficult they continued to maintain the flow of ideas (Graves, 1983). Very often the process of getting down their ideas was very "difficult going" and meant that the students sometimes concentrated on one particular skill at a time in their writing and appeared to regress in another. This was also a fairly common feature of children's writing.

Spelling and Punctuation

Although the students generally moved toward standard spelling, as they had more exposure to resources to spell words, they were not always consistent in using the correct form. For example, with the use of resources Rachel spelled the word "Montreal" correctly in an earlier entry and later, when she attempted it on her own, managed "Monteol". In order to determine any indications of development, it would be important for the teacher to know when the student was using an outside resource such as a dictionary or environmental print and when she was attempting to spell on her own.

Periods, commas, quotation marks and other forms of punctuation came into the writing gradually as the students began to learn about the construction of a sentence and how the punctuation could change and affect meaning. This was a difficult concept for adult beginner English learners, when they had not accomplished writing in full sentences. Many of the journal entries were peppered with periods, mostly at the end of one particular thought or phrase. For example, Lai Sheng wrote "beforer came to Canada." and "Learning English." Ali, on the other hand, developed an understanding for the use of quotation marks in her writing of terms such as "lucky money" and "Tu Nguyen Tong" when he wrote in both English and Vietnamese.

Vocabulary

For the most part the students were limited to a fairly basic literal choice of words in their vocabulary. As their speech improved and as they were exposed to new words through interaction with me and in their reading and discussions with the other students, I noted the students used a wider variety of words in their journal entries. They were curious to know the meaning of unfamiliar words and wanted to try them out in their writing. Kam moved quickly in his learning and growth in oral language and this development was evident in his choice of words. For example, Kam used a wide range of descriptive and specific words and phrases such as "urbane manness", "economized", "potluck dinner" and "animated atmosphere". Abano also demonstrated the use of more sophisticated language in his writing. For example, he chose words such as "denounce", "independence" and "revolution" to describe his past experiences. As I observed the students' writing, I was continually aware of how creatively they selected particular words and how skillfully they arranged them to create imagery and voice.

Organization

Some of the students were consistent in the ways they organized their writing in all the journal entries they produced. Short simple sentences written in chronological order continued for Mohamed and Rachel throughout the session. However, Martha progressed from lists of words to short simple sentences until she eventually attempted to write the following complex sentence: "In the Sudan we lived in a many different houses because husband was teacher and we moved." Even though the syntax was weak, Martha demonstrated tremendous growth in her understanding of what constituted a sentence. The growth in using a balance of shorter and longer sentences, with appropriate connectives, made many of the entries easier to read and demonstrated more fluency on the part of the writer. The student's ability to create a narrative structure with one sentence connecting with the next was becoming evident as I continued to examine the samples of students' writing. Only a few of the students progressed into writing more than one paragraph.

Diverse Perspectives and Approaches to Journal Writing in ESL Classrooms

As a way of extending my learning about ESL students' experiences in journal writing, I examined the journal writing practices of some of the other teachers in the school where I teach. I discovered out of thirty-five teachers only six (including myself) used journals of any kind to teach English as another language. However, only four teachers were available for interviews. I arranged a time to talk with the teachers about their views on using journals in the classroom and about ways they implemented journal writing into their programs. The levels these teachers taught ranged from three to five which were more advanced stages of English Language Development. I recorded different perspectives from the teachers I interviewed which demonstrated the variety of ways teachers generally perceive the purpose of using dialogue journals in teaching.

I have organized the information I received from the teachers under the following five headings: (1) purpose, (2) content, (3) procedures, (4) attitudes of the students, (5) role of the teacher.

Purpose

Two of the teachers described their reasons for using journals as ways of getting to know the students more personally. One teacher said, "I feel I'm making a connection with the students and making teaching more meaningful with journal writing." She explained that knowing the students was important in taking them from where they are and helping them to grow in learning English. Another teacher expressed the openness of the students to share the happenings within their families and within their groups of friends when they were writing in the journal as opposed to other forms of writing. She said many students reveal "all kinds of joy and pain they have experienced even before coming to Canada." Students don't have to worry about expressing these ideas in the "right words". They learn that they can have ideas and can be understood in English. Another teacher in the school stressed the importance of journal writing to learn new

vocabulary, paragraph structure, sentence structure and parts of speech, and to practice these skills in natural ways within the journal.

Content

Most of the teachers described the content as personal writing focusing on life experiences, family matters, and events going on in the school. They felt that it was important to allow students to express their thoughts, opinions, ideas and feelings in written form in order "to enhance their facility of the language". The teachers also agreed that the content the students wrote about in class varied as they progressed through the course. One teacher said she encouraged the students to create their own fictional stories and write them down in their journals. She felt that writing stories was not only a way to provide them with interesting content, but the process would also help to develop their creative thinking. The stories came out of discussion surrounding pictures as prompts. The students made up stories orally about the pictures and then wrote them to the best of their ability in their journals. Another teacher who also used story writing as content said she sometimes gave the students a topic in the form of a question to think about and then to write in their journals. For example, she asked them to recall the most embarrassing moment in their lives and to describe this experience in writing.

Attitudes of their Students

I asked the teachers about the attitudes of the students in their classes concerning the practice of journal writing. Did their students enjoy using journals? Did they see them as valuable in learning English? The consensus was that many of the students were very motivated to write and they found journal writing a highlight of their program. One of the reasons cited by their students was the freedom they had to write freely without worrying about perfect grammar and spelling. The teachers mentioned that some of the students wanted to have their work corrected or marked and if that is not the purpose of the journal it can be difficult for the student to understand why the teacher is hesitant to grade this kind of work. Another teacher described how her students sometimes "moan

and groan" because writing is such hard work. She explained that she understood this feeling because she recognized that "writing is difficult especially for those who do not think in English." However, this teacher commented that she was usually able to "tease them out of it" and the students were pleased and surprised by how much their writing was improving as they went along.

Procedures

All of the teachers said that the students wrote nearly everyday during class time and sometimes at home. They wrote individually but occasionally one of the teachers allowed them to write with a partner. Some of the teachers engaged the students in discussions before the writing. These discussions varied in the amount of direction from the teacher and the focus and purpose of the talk. For example, a teacher who used pictures as prompts described how the students within groups talked about the content of the pictures and suggested a sequential order to place them in to create a narrative story. Another teacher explained how she got the students to write for a couple of weeks before correcting anything in the journals. She felt this was important to give them encouragement to write more. "I ask the students to write without asking classmates for help or without the use of dictionaries or looking elsewhere for spelling so they get the 'flow' going. Then later I encourage them to go back and improve their mechanics." All of the students in these classes had some kind of opportunity to share their work with others. One teacher said she preferred to check the grammar and flow before the student attempted to read the piece of writing aloud. This was to make it easier for the student to read in English. Another teacher said she stressed confidentiality but left it up to the student whether they shared their stories or other writing with someone else. "Occasionally, I ask permission to show their journal to another teacher or to read it aloud."

Role of the Teacher

When I talked with the teachers about their role as teachers of ESL students who were using journals to learn English, their comments included a number of similarities and

differences. One teacher stressed the importance of teaching paragraphing, vocabulary and grammar and she saw the journals as an ideal opportunity "to diagnose students' weaknesses or strengths in order to plan lessons best suited to their needs". She felt the journals provided samples of students' work and would serve as an indicator of their achievement at that point. She also found that the journals told her about some of the personal problems students might be experiencing and would allow her an opportunity to help with situations in their lives outside of school. Most of the teachers saw their role as one of communicating with the student through the journals in the form of response to their journal entries. One teacher commented, "I write back to them to show empathy, concern, or to share their joy."

The Researcher's Reflections On Diverse Approaches to Journal Writing

Talking with the teachers in the school in which I teach I discovered similarities and differences in their perspectives and approaches to many aspects of journal writing, as I described above. The main reason for their choosing journals ranged from the desire for their students to write personally and expressively to students using the journal to practice skills and conventions of written language. Some teachers encouraged students to write about their life experiences while others focused on writing prescribed sentences and fictional stories as content. The teachers' answers varied when asked about the use of resources such as dictionaries, peer help or environmental print on the walls or chalkboard to support the students' writing. One teacher said she discouraged the use of dictionaries and wanted the students to write for a set period of time without drawing on outside resources. The teachers showed differences in the way they perceived their role in the writing process. Some of the teachers concentrated on using the journals for assessment purposes as the basis for planning. Others felt the enjoyment the students experienced was most important. While all the teachers were concerned with the

students' progress in language development through the journal writing, I noted that none mentioned the value of language for learning about Canadian culture.

It was not too surprising that among the teachers in the same school there existed a variety of different perspectives and different ways of using journal writing in teaching English as a Second Language. However, despite the different approaches used it was clear that all the students benefited from writing in journals. The approach to journal writing with most teachers reflected their philosophy of teaching and learning and what they believe about language and how language learning takes place. Teachers who have difficulty seeing beyond the errors and believe that writing needs to be error free even at the beginning stages of learning a language are less likely to find journal writing a satisfactory way to teach. Whereas "part of the power of writing is that it does not have to be right the first time, that drafts can usually be modified or even thrown away" (Smith, 1983, p.85).

I've discovered that some teachers in schools are hesitant to use journals because they are unaccustomed to teaching the writing process and view this approach as "far too open-ended and too time consuming". Teachers who are new to journals sometimes also worry about how to respond appropriately to what the students are writing. They are also unfamiliar with ways to assess and evaluate the language learning of their students. Newman (1988) shares her apprehension as a teacher of adults and a "relative newcomer to journals": "Journal writing creates opportunities for the unexpected to emerge" (p.155). Not all teachers are comfortable with the unexpected or with the possibilities of change. Newman indicated that she was comfortable with the unexpected but at that point not sure just how to respond helpfully to her students' "comments, assertions, and arguments which offer us a fresh way of seeing things ..." (p.155). Since reading Newman's article "Sharing Journals: Conversational Mirrors for Seeing Ourselves as Learners, Writers and Teachers", I have tried and appreciated many of her ideas for ways to respond to the students' journals in my own classroom.

Summary

Learning to speak, think and write in a second language required continuous practice in using language in purposeful and meaningful ways. While learning to write draws on all of the elements of the way we use language, writing also requires knowing the conventions specific to writing. The act of creating the letters of the alphabet, spelling, punctuation, selecting appropriate words and forming them into sentences and eventually into paragraphs is referred to by Smith (1983) as "the transcription aspects of writing", which means the act of writing down the print. Smith cautions teachers to maintain a balance between emphasizing transcription and composition. "For all writers undue concern with transcription can interfere with composition, the creative and exploratory aspect of writing which is, of course, its major value to the writer." (p.83). This balance was reflected in the way the students dealt with combining the ideas they wanted to convey in their messages and transcribing these ideas into written form. It was only after the students began to create more volume in their writing that they requested correcting and marking by the teacher. When to correct, when to teach conventions directly, and when to stand back and allow the writer to learn to write by writing remained an ongoing challenge for me as a teacher. In my conversations with other ESL teachers in the school who were also using journals with their students, I discovered that most struggled with the role of the teacher in knowing the best ways to use journals as a tool for language learning.

Chapter 6

Summary, Findings, Implications and Conclusion

> In no one case is knowledge of the mechanical means of literacy alone sufficient to make a man literate. He also has to know the proper use of language.... Rousseau is father of the belief that language, far from being a realization of experience, is a veil over it that we must penetrate in order to reach the primary level of our being.
>
> Pattison (1982, pp. 190,192)

Summary of the Study

The study centered on dialogue journal writing as a useful tool for ESL adult students to develop language and literacy and an understanding of Canadian culture by writing expressively about their experiences, thoughts and feelings. However, as Pattison reminds us, becoming fully literate involves more than having the knowledge of the mechanical aspects of literacy. He points out "Literacy is a potent form of consciousness" (p. x). He goes on to say that Rousseau believed, the power of language is a veil that must be penetrated to go beyond the portrayal of experience in order to act as a means of understanding ourselves and the world we live in. These theoretical ideas, along with theories of language educators such as Britton (1982), Smith (1982), Martin (1976), Bruner (1996) and researchers who have explored various aspects of second language learning such as Piper (1993), Mlynarczyk (1998), and Peyton and Staton (1996), are fundamental to this research study.

This study was an investigation into the power of journal writing as a means for newcomers to Canada to learn English as a second language in both spoken and written

forms and to learn about the new culture in which they are now living. In order to carry out this study, the research question asked was: In the views of adult ESL students and their teachers, how does dialogue journal writing help in the development of competency and confidence in students' acquisition and contribute to a better understanding of Canadian culture?

The group of students who participated in this study was composed of men and women who had immigrated to Canada from a wide range of cultures. The level of education they had received in their native countries varied. As a result, the students ranged from being illiterate in their first language to having considerable reading and writing skill (in their first language). However, their knowledge and skills in English were very limited and so they were placed at the beginning level in the school in which I was a teacher of English as a second language.

As the teacher of this group of students I tried to create a classroom atmosphere that would empower the students to have confidence and to achieve success in their English language development. I also wanted them to use language in as many situations as possible and this included writing regularly in their dialogue journals (using expressive language). With this goal in mind, it was important for me to provide meaningful and interesting lessons, to model my own writing and to support and respond positively to the students' attempts to create print and to carry on a conversation in English in the best way they could. Students worked individually but I also organized small groups as much as possible so the students would not feel inhibited speaking in a large group. Working in groups as communities of learners allowed for more comfortable interaction and social contacts. As the students talked among themselves and shared their work, they developed not only respect for each other but they learned a great deal about cultures other than their own. For example, the students would often attempt to describe a particular festival or celebration related to their cultural or religious traditions and customs.

The role of talk in the students' learning of English was of utmost importance. The students' writing was rooted in their oral language and, as we know from research in

learning a first language, speech must precede both reading and writing. As Dudley-Marling and Searle (1991) state: "In general, there is a strong reciprocal relationship between oral and written language...Writers use talk to develop their topics, clarify their thinking, and discuss their writing with potential audiences" (p. 20). We began each day with each student participating in a class conversation. In the early stages of the course the oral discussions were very short and limited in vocabulary which might only have consisted of a few words or simple sentences. However, as time went on and the trust and familiarity the students felt with each other increased, they took more risks and were willing to try saying new words and to find new ways of putting them together in phrases and sentences. My role during these conversations was to become actively involved, and to model good listening habits and to give the students reassurance and encouraging kinds of responses.

While journal writing is well established in many regular classrooms in school systems, fewer teachers of adult ESL students, especially those working with immigrants at the beginning level, consider journal writing as an important tool for teaching English. It is often considered an extra form of writing apart from practice sheets and a form that allows for more personal expression of ideas and experiences. When I looked into the use of journals generally in ESL classrooms, I found that many teachers who use journals usually focused more on the use of journals for learning about language or on the <u>how</u> to write in English. They paid less attention to the link between writing and thinking or to the idea of writing to learn about the writer him/herself or about the nature of Canadian life and culture. Whereas, I have discovered that even with very inexperienced second language learners, both purposes for using journals can be served. For example, the students in this study were learning various aspects of the mechanics of the English language while they were writing in their journals but at the same time they were growing in understanding of Canadian culture through the act of writing reflectively. In other words, they were demonstrating the theories of learning to write while writing to learn. (Martin, 1976; Britton, 1982; Graves, 1983; Smith, 1982).

In order to explore certain aspects of teaching and learning English in my ESL classroom, I adopted the stance of teacher as researcher. My goal was to further my understanding of how the students approached their language learning through the use of dialogue journals, so I could use this knowledge as the basis for planning and further instruction. The study was carried out in my own classroom in a school which offered a program for adults in English as a second language. The program was funded and organized by the Federal Government and provided language instruction for newcomers to Canada (LINC). As a teacher in this program, I carried out this research as part of my daily teaching. The participants in the study were students in my class who provided me with permission to use their journals and transcriptions from their tape-recorded interviews as data. I found the content of the interviews with the students served as a valuable validity check as I examined the content of their written comments in the journal entries. The students were comfortable during the interviews and seemed to enjoy the experience of engaging in conversation with the teacher. I used purposeful sampling (Gall, Borg and Gall 1996) to select nine participants out of a total of 31 students. Other sources of data were provided by interviews with four other teachers in the same school, concerning their perspectives and experiences with journal writing in their classrooms.

The qualitative methodology I used was that of teacher as researcher in which I observed and monitored the students' attitudes and progress in their work and recorded observations in my field notes. I have always kept a journal of my own thoughts about teaching and learning and I used this personal writing of my own perceptions and understandings to reflect on throughout the study. This approach of combining teaching and researching became a natural avenue for me to live out my belief that teachers need to be thoughtful observers and use reflective practices to promote learning through teaching. I saw this opportunity to use the learning that resulted in this study as the basis for developing and refining curriculum outcomes and for learning more effective teaching strategies in order to enable my students to become literate. Stenhouse (1984) supports these ideas in his statement "teachers should become curriculum researchers and curriculum developers" (p.94).

Even before beginning this study, I was already using journal writing as a process for teaching the ESL curriculum. Therefore, the use of journals was already part of my day-to-day instruction, rather than something added for the study. I believe now more than ever that the notion of teacher as researcher is an extension of normal reflective teaching but more rigorous. "We need teachers who are reflective, critical and inquiring. We need teachers who are comfortable with problems and for whom genuine discussion and inquiry with students is valued" (Fullan and Connelly, 1987, p.50).

Data for this study consisted of samples of students' journal writing as well as transcripts of taped interviews with the students and with other teachers. I analyzed the form and the content of the journal writing to determine the growth in language development, as well as analyzing the topics, patterns and themes. I looked at the language development in light of writing components such as length, content, organization, sentence structure, vocabulary and mechanics. I compared a number of samples of the students' writing over time and looked at an early sample then compared the development in one produced by the same student later in the session.

I also examined the writing to determine the nature of the topics the students wrote about. Sometimes we brain-stormed ideas for writing, especially right after a field trip, but the students mostly chose their content for the journal writing. I charted the topics according to the individual students so I could determine which topics seemed important to them and, as a result, reoccurred over the period of time. I noted similar preferred subjects among the group. What did stand out for me, however, was how the ESL students in this study wrote about topics that clearly mattered to them, such as their families, their native countries, and their perceptions of Canada. Britton (1983) points out that "It is important for students to write about *what* matters to them to someone *who* matters to them" (p. 110 Italics mine). While Britton was referring to children in school, the same ideas apply to adults who are beginning literacy learners in a new language. While the audience for the students' journal writing was mainly themselves, they also wanted to share their writing with other students and with me. The students bonded very

much with each other and became a community of learners, all wanting to learn the language of a new culture. They trusted me as their teacher and had confidence in my leading them toward literacy. The themes emerged from the data in the content of the students' journal entries. Through interpretation of key words and phrases of what they had written literally, I saw repeated patterns in the messages that were revealed within each of the journal entries. As I examined both the topics and the emerging themes, I learned more about the students as persons with strengths, weaknesses, feelings of loneliness, confidence or insecurity as well as pride in their own accomplishments and those of their family members.

As teacher and researcher I was concerned with the data analysis in light of the theoretical framework that supported this study. I reflected on the implications of these findings for my own teaching and also for other English as a second language teachers. The major findings are as follows:

1. The beliefs and practices surrounding the learning of a first language are very similar to those involved in second language learning for adult non-native students.

2. Dialogue journals can be a valid means of accommodating a wide range of individual differences within the ESL classroom.

3. Even with beginner adult literacy learners dialogue journals can enable students to grow in literacy and language development and to learn about Canadian culture.

Findings of the Study

This qualitative study sought to describe one teacher's practice surrounding the use of dialogue journals in teaching ESL students English as a second language. It is illustrative of my philosophy of teaching and learning language in action in the classroom. The results of this research are not necessarily generalizable as they would be in a scientific

study where the purpose was on proving scientific principles, for example. However, according to Guba and Lincoln cited in Peyton and Staton (1993) "...transferability" is a more appropriate goal of social science research than "generalizability" (pp.25- 26).

The findings of this study in relation to the sub-questions found on pages 6 and 7 are as follows:

Sub-questions

1. How do the topics the students write about in their journals relate to the characteristics of a culture?

The topics the students wrote about in their journals related to characteristics of a culture in several ways. The five main topics identified included 1. Family 2 . Native Country 3. Interests and Hopes for the Future 4. Customs and Traditions 5. Features of Canada. These topics dealt with aspects of students' lives that illustrated the ways they lived out their values and beliefs throughout their day-to-day experiences. They compared and contrasted many of the physical, social and ideological features of their native county and Canada in their discussions and in their written journal entries.

2. What are the patterns and themes that emerge in the journal entries?

I identified the following four recurring patterns and themes as they surfaced in the students' journal entries. 1. Aloneness 2. Hard work 3. Optimism 4. Identity. The students' writing revealed a strong feeling of homesickness and lack of friends and family which suggested a sense of aloneness. The students recognized the challenge facing them in learning to think and write in English. They indicated that the task was hard work. Many of the entries were written in a tone of optimism and hope that the future would be brighter and more productive as a result of their learning the language of a new country. The theme of identity was revealed through the students' writing with pride about their own cultural traditions and values.

3. How does writing in journals enable students' development in language acquisition?

The students demonstrated growth in their language acquisition in speech and in writing. The talk that surrounded the writing tasks allowed the students to use language to communicate with each other and to develop new vocabulary. The students' language competency increased in written form as they learned and practiced new systems of print to create letters, words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs. They were using expressive language to describe everyday events, thoughts and feelings in their writing as well as in their talk. They shared their written messages with each other verbally through discussions as well. The amount of writing the students produced also increased over the period of the study.

4. What is the student's disposition toward writing as a way of learning about a new language and culture?

The students developed a positive attitude toward writing in journals even though the task was for many a difficult one. Their feedback verbally and the comments in the journal entries indicated a strong appreciation for taking part in a new approach to learning through discovery, discussion and experimenting with print. They were proud of their accomplishments and participated willingly in discussions and in sharing what they had written. At the end of the course when the students looked over all that they had written in their journals, they felt a real sense of accomplishment and pride in what they had done.

Other important findings emerged from the study as well. There are a number of features of this study such as the theoretical foundation supporting teacher as learner, classroom organization and methods of teaching that can be readily transferred to other teachers' practices in both ESL and regular classrooms.

One of the most important findings of this study for program planners and for teachers of adult ESL students is that the conditions and the theories supporting learning a first

language apply to learning a second language as well. This finding is supported by the research of Piper (1993), Peyton and Staton (1993) and Mlynarczyk (1998) who have studied second language acquisition in the context of teaching with dialogue journals as a way for students to learn English and important aspects of a new culture.

Traditionally it was thought that second language learners learned differently and needed a different kind of language instruction. However, as Peyton and Staton (1993) point out "...learning to read and write for non-native as well as native speakers can be a process much like the natural, functional process of oral language acquisition as it occurs between parents and children" (p.122). Piper (1993) also declares her "belief, based on research and experience, that there are more similarities than differences between first and second language acquisition " (p. v). Among the similarities is the variation of individual differences in the way students process information and think and go about reading and writing (Mlynarczyk (1998) p. 12).

I found there was a wide range of experiences and abilities among the adult students in my class. The use of open-ended dialogue journals was helpful in addressing this particular kind of diversity. Writing expressively in the journals allowed the students to write about thoughts, feelings and experiences that came from their own lives. They were encouraged to draw on their personal knowledge or on what they already knew. The students had come from many different countries and were members of varied cultural and ethnic groups. They were representative of a wide diversity of first languages learned and spoken in their native countries. The education they had received before coming to Canada and their present ability to write in English also varied. Because the journals were open-ended in the students' choice of topic and the format for creating the text they were able to write at their own pace and stage of language development. Most classrooms today reflect a diversity of individual differences in abilities, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds and other special needs, all of which could benefit from this study.

Implications for Classroom Practice

The finding that second language acquisition has similarities with first language acquisition is basic to this study, which is based on an established body of research in language learning by Britton (1970), Halliday (1975), and Smith (1982). Their research has been extended by the work of other researchers over the past twenty-five years and has, ultimately, for many teachers changed the way we understand and the way we teach language in regular classrooms in schools.

As Bainbridge and Malicky (1996) point out "Today our thoughts about knowledge and learning are different. The emphasis is upon the construction of meaning and understanding, rather than the reproduction of already existing knowledge; upon reasoning rather than recall" (p. 18).

While in recent years, however, changes in strategies and methods of teaching language may have taken place in many regular classrooms, the implementation of this research into practice has been much slower coming into programs designed for students from other cultures who are learning English for the first time. My observations and experience in teaching ESL in a variety of settings has shown me that this resistance to change is even more evident in classrooms of adult ESL learners.

The need for the change noted above provides one reason for teachers to become researchers in their own classrooms. If we want teachers to participate in educational research such as this study and to benefit from other research in the area of dialogue journals in the teaching of second language learning (such as Peyton and Staton 1993), we need to encourage teachers to explore and reflect on their own beliefs and teaching practices as teachers and learners. Marling and Searle (1991) when speaking of teachers as researchers remind us that "Teachers learn how to teach by carefully observing students in their classrooms and in other settings and then stepping back and reflecting on what they've observed" (p. 86). As a teacher researcher, one way that I reflected on and explored aspects of my own practice as a way of trying to continually improve my

teaching of ESL students was by writing regularly in my own journal. I shared my written thoughts with the students not only as a way of building our relationship but also to demonstrate to them how I went about this task.

As this study reveals, the students were highly motivated to write in their own journals. This suggests for other teachers the importance of modeling and demonstrating the use of language in the form of journal writing as the students learn language by recalling and recording experiences, events and feelings in written form. Part of the students' desire to write in their journals was closely tied to the freedom they felt to choose their own topics and to write freely without worrying about errors. However, not all students are comfortable at experimenting with language and they want to "get it right" the first time. Therefore, it is important for teachers to be patient with students who are less willing to take risks and to try to encourage them to get down their ideas or to focus on meaning rather than form, particularly at the beginning stages.

This study also reminds us of the social and cultural nature of language and that language is learned through interaction with other people within a safe and stimulating environment. This finding has important implications for classroom organization and teaching strategies surrounding the journal writing. For example, I found the role of talk to be very important both before and after the actual writing took place. In this study the students were involved in conversations with each other as well as "conversations of the mind" in the form of dialogue journals. The students wrote in their journals to other students or the teacher as audience and sometimes asked simple questions to gain information about each other, such as "how do you get to school?" or "what is your favorite food?" Other times, a simple question asked orally before the writing such as "what is your favorite color and why?" led into a further conversation that revealed cultural associations of certain words. For example, in the case of the question about favorite colors, one student cited green as his favorite because in his culture, the Koran stated the color green was a symbol of heaven. This meant the person would be with God. In his culture, green would be a preferred favorite color because of the religious

connotation. This kind of talk which began with asking a short simple question followed by journal writing created a situation of..." people talking to each other in writing, exchanging hopes and fears, evaluating, assuring, questioning, and clarifying" (Staton, Shuy, Peyton and Reed, 1988, p. 81).

My responding to the students' writing in their journals was also a form of active communication or dialogue between us. The students were writing about real life situations that held personal meaning for them. Because their writing was real it was easier for me to respond personally in natural conversational ways. Hunt (1987), in describing the importance of keeping interaction between students and teachers real, says "If we can begin creating situations in which students' writing serves the real purposes of writers and readers we can respond to students' writing as though it were real...it will be real" (p. 231).

Rather than evaluating what was written about in the journal entry or how it was written, I tried to listen and respond to the meaning the students were constructing for themselves in the same way I would respond in an oral conversation. I was more interested in modeling and extending the students' language in my written remarks than evaluating their work at that point. I believe that marking and evaluation are more appropriate at the time of testing rather than during a discussion period or in a teacher's response to a journal entry.

My observations of how language was used in very real ways to communicate feelings and to promote social interaction implied the importance of students working in groups and sharing their cultural experiences in both talk and writing in the classroom as part of their learning.

Another implication of this study relates to the use of dialogue journals in regular classrooms where the population includes ESL students of all ages from a wide range of cultures. While the use of journals in these classrooms is well established, this study suggests that writing expressively and reflectively can be a valuable tool for language

and cultural learning for newcomers of all ages to Canadian schools. This is true even for writers who are at the beginning stages of creating print. With young children, for example, drawing can be an acceptable medium to express ideas and real life experiences in the form of writing in a journal. Pictures can serve as prompts for dialogue and further writing as students interpret and respond to visual images. Teachers can model letters and words in their response to a picture as a way of teaching language in written form to all students. For young children who are learning English as a second language in regular classrooms, journal writing could provide them with a safe context for using their own thinking, knowledge, experiences and cultural backgrounds as topics to write about in school.

A final implication of this study relates to the role of the teacher as learner. As teachers read the journal entries they need to read not only for language acquisition but to look beyond the literal words to discover the essence of the student as a person. Writing is communication and in their journals the students were using language to communicate meaning, not to demonstrate how much they knew or how well they could write. Responding appropriately demonstrates that the teacher has read the entry thoughtfully. Knowing our students is crucial in order to understand them and hence lead them toward literacy. Journal entries can be read in many different ways for different purposes. If we pay attention to key words and phrases in the writing and reflect on what the student is saying we can often learn about their dreams, interests, struggles and feelings. Other common forms of writing such as worksheets, essay writing, and question and answer formats would not provide this same opportunity for teachers to communicate meaningfully and to learn as much about the lives of their students.

Implications for Research

In this chapter I have addressed some of the areas that I consider important for teaching not only in ESL classrooms but in schools generally. Apart from implications for

classroom practice there are implications for further research in the areas of second language learning and cultural understanding. The following suggestions for future study come from my own reading and reflections on my research.

- While much of the theory supporting learning a first language has already been shown to be effective with second language learners, more research would be beneficial in the area of exploring the similarities and differences in first and second language acquisition.

- Further investigation into the relationship of teachers' response to students' journal entries and students' motivation in wanting to write is suggested by this study.

- I did not find that women in this study were more willing than men to express their thoughts and feelings in the journal writing. Therefore, this finding may require further investigation into any variation of attitudes related to gender.

- In light of the fact that the participants in this study were from a wide range of diverse countries of origin, further study into patterns of interaction among students from different cultures as well as students from the same ethnic backgrounds is suggested.

- More research is suggested in the area of second language learning with students who are literate in their native language compared to students who are introduced to literacy and culture for the first time in a new language.

- The use of dialogue journals with ESL students alone will not guarantee success in literacy learning. More research on the knowledge and role of the teacher as model, facilitator and coach in helping students to develop language and understanding of culture is suggested.

Conclusions of the Study

This study focused on the use of dialogue journals as a tool for ESL adult students to learn English and to gain an understanding of the new culture they have entered into. The research confirms the value of journal writing as a major means of developing language and learning about Canadian ways. While dialogue journals are not a new concept in regular classrooms they are seldom considered as a means of learning language or using language for learning in ESL classrooms. Yet I discovered that by using journal writing as the major medium for adult students to learn English they not only grew in language development but they also learned a great deal about the culture they are now living in.

The study confirmed for me the significance of particular qualities in a program designed for adult ESL students, such as the value of open ended writing activities that allow for choices in topics and for individual differences in style and experimentation with language. I am reminded too of the principal role of students using their language in conversations and discussions as a means of learning to use language in written form. The study also reaffirmed for me that even students at the beginning stages of literacy and English language learning could demonstrate the power of writing for providing information but also writing as exploratory and discovery learning.

Dialogue journal writing is one strategy that can enable students to grow toward literacy for practical purposes but can also empower the student to feel respected as a member of what Smith (1988) calls "the literacy club". To be literate in Canada is crucial to employment and to becoming a contributing member of society. It is encouraging to note, as reported in the Edmonton Journal , July 23, 1999, that since this study began the Canadian government has acknowledged the need and is making provision for further ESL education and job training opportunities for newcomers to Canada. The provincial school boards will now benefit from an infusion of $26 million for ESL and special needs programs. By lifting the funding cap on spending for K-12 programs in English as

a second language, more attention may be given to the needs of immigrants and their families. This trend in increased funding might extend into ESL programs designed for adults in Continuing Education programs such as LINC.

This study has strengthened my belief that, while exemplary programs, teaching strategies or methods supported by curriculum guides are only tools for teaching and learning English as a second language, the most important factor is the teacher 's knowledge, philosophy of teaching and cultural sensitivity and understanding of all students' experiences and varied ethnic backgrounds.

Kraft (1975) in his book The Living Classroom refers to the importance of the teacher using Kahlil Gibran's words from the Prophet:

> The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness. If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter his house of wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind (p.92).

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Appendix A

Student Permission Letter

As a teacher and a graduate student at the University of Alberta, I am doing a Masters thesis in education on the benefits of journal writing. This will help me to plan a better program in future classes. This letter is a request for your permission to allow me to record our conversations, transcribe audio tapes, collect journal samples and to use any data collected as the basis of my research study. This information will be anonymous and confidential. If at any time you wish to withdraw from this study, please feel free to do so.

I, _____, give Joanie Parker permission for the above request.

Date: _____

Appendix B

Standardized open-ended Interview Questions - biographical information

1. What is your name?
2. Where are you from?
3. What was your job in your native country?
4. What job would you like to do in Canada?
5. When did you come to Canada?
6. Did you know anything about Canada before you came here?
7. What do you like about living in Canada and what don't you like?
8. Are you married, single or other?
9. Do you have any children?
10. How many children do you have?
11. When is your birthday?
12. What are your hobbies?

Informal Conversational Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your family.
2. Tell me about your native country.
3. Do you like school? Why or why not?
4. Tell me about school in your native country.
5. Tell me about your experience in studying English and your experiences of writing.
6. Do you ever write in English other than when you are at school? Can you think of times when you might need to write in English?
7. Compare your experience of writing in Canada with writing in your native country.
8. How do you feel when I ask you to write in your journal?
9. What was it like to use the dialogue journal from your perspective?
10. What do you see as most helpful in learning to write?

Appendix C

Discussion Questions with Other ESL Teachers

1. What is your purpose in getting your students to do journal writing?
2. How often do students write in their journals?
3. Where do they usually write in their journals?
4. When do they usually write in their journals?
5. Do they usually write individually, with partners or in groups?
6. Do students ever talk about what they are going to write before they begin?
7. Do students ever share what they have written with each other or anyone else?
8. Do you ever get students to write a second draft?
9. Do students ever have music playing in the background or anything else while they are writing?
10. Other comments: